

# THE CAR OF CROESUS




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# THE CAR OF CROESUS

By  
ERNEST POOLE

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THE AVALANCHE  
BEGGARS' GOLD  
BLIND  
DANGER  
THE HARBOR  
HIS FAMILY  
HIS SECOND WIFE  
THE DARK PEOPLE  
THE VILLAGE  
THE HUNTERS' MOON  
LITTLE DARK MAN AND  
OTHER RUSSIAN SKETCHES  
MILLIONS  
WITH EASTERN EYES  
SILENT STORMS  
THE CAR OF CROESUS



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BY  
ERNEST POOLE

NEW YORK  
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1930

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FICTION

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## CHAPTER I

AT the Grand Central Station in New York, on a brilliant, clear September day, a long, luxurious limousine came softly up to the Vanderbilt entrance, and the two men in the front seat exchanged a few words in a gruff foreign tongue. The chauffeur, who was a thin little man, appeared to be nervous and worried; but his huge companion gave him a light pat on the shoulder and a reassuring smile, as he stepped easily out of the car. This other was Prince Ivan Borissovitch. He entered the station, and from the top of the broad marble stairway paused for a moment to look down.

Thick-set and heavy, with powerful chest and a dark, blunt, enormous face, with huge, wide jaw and broad cheek bones—he was a bull, he was a giant, he was a gargoyle of a man. And yet there was nothing clumsy or crude. Well

groomed, in a dark, quiet suit, his whole bearing was easy and self-assured; and as he stood there, looking down into that spacious marble hall, that vast cathedral of unrest with its crowds of skurrying figures, the whimsical smile on his heavy lips and the gleam in his wide-set, big black eyes would have made a close observer feel that here was an individual of a varied large experience, who took still a deep, fresh relish in life.

He went down the steps and made his way to the gate, where people were gathered to meet an incoming train from Chicago; and a little later he came back, gayly and easily talking with the vivacious young blonde at his side. She was about thirty, and smart and attractive, with clever, bright, alert blue eyes. She wore a close-fitting suit of brown, and behind her came a Red Cap with patent leather bag and hat box, while her huge companion bore a rich fur cloak on his arm. They came out of the station, and presently that long, luxurious limousine slid softly up in front of them. At sight of it, she gave a slight start.



"Oh, what a lamb of a car!" she exclaimed, with an inquisitive flash of her eyes. Then they caught sight of the crest on the door. "Oh, Prince! And is this your coat of arms?" she demanded, as she bent to look.

"The crest of my family," he replied. "It is at your service. Now, dear lady, where shall we lunch?" She smiled back in a curious, challenging way.

"Oh, I couldn't eat anything yet," she answered. "Suppose we drop my bags at the Ritz and go up for a little run in the Park, in this adorable car of yours."

Once more that inquisitive little flash came into her warm, brilliant eyes, while her huge companion turned and gave the order to the chauffeur. As he did so, some slight shade of disturbance crossed his dark, enormous face; but to the worried, anxious scowl of the lean little man in the front seat, the Prince Borissovitch replied as before by a reassuring smile, which said: "Now, now, let us be quite comfortable." Serenely stepping into the car, he said to his companion:

“It is good for me to be with you again.” And he settled down with a sigh of content.

They had first met some weeks before, on her last trip to New York. She was a young Chicago widow, very rich, apparently; and he, an exiled nobleman from the south of Russia, where his ancient family had once owned immense estates. They had met in a night club, the *Club Russe*. The Prince, for all his enormous bulk, was an easy, graceful and quite indefatigable dancer. They had danced together several nights. As they chatted together easily now, intimate ties of companionship, good-humored, gay and friendly, seemed to be established here. And yet the little appraising looks, that came on their faces from time to time, were a bit like those of fencers watching for an opening. When they had left the Ritz, he asked:

“How long shall you be this time in New York?” And with a helpless little shrug of her shoulders, she replied:

“Oh, my dear Prince, how can I know? My plans are so vague. I am so free.” He moved a little closer.

"Dear lady, you should not be free!" But she disregarded that.

"I am thinking of running over to France."

"I should like to go with you to France," he declared. With a swift, coquettish glance, she rejoined:

"Already—when you know me so little?"

"I shall soon know you better now." As he spoke, there came into his big black eyes a kindly, friendly, challenging look; and she answered it by one of her own, which seemed to say: "Before this day is over, my dear, I shall know you better, too!"

And she began to question him. How could they ever be really friends while his background was so strange to her? She was simply dying to know more of his life in Russia, she said. So he told of his old family home, the vast estates down on the Volga, the palace in Moscow, all lost to him now. With ever quickening interest and sympathy her questions came, and swift, inquisitive looks as well, now at her huge companion and again at the lean little chauffeur, whose whole figure and whose face, which she could

see in profile, seemed rigid with uneasiness. 'Round and 'round the Park they went, and the Prince Ivan Borissovitch appeared to be unruffled still. Calmly and serenely, in his low, deep, magnetic voice, he told her what she asked to know. The names of illustrious relatives, at the old Russian Court and in the army, fell smoothly and naturally from his lips. Some had been killed and the rest of them were scattered émigrés, he said. With more murmured sympathy, she begged him to tell her just a little of his long service in the war; and quite simply he replied that almost since the war began, he had served with the Grand Duke Nicholai. As one of his staff, he had taken part in a great two hundred mile advance down into the Carpathians; it had cost a million Russian lives. As he pictured that awful havoc and death, he moved closer; but drawing back a bit, she exclaimed, with a little shiver of reproach:

“What terrible men you Russians are!” He answered:

“I am a hungry man. I think now we had

better go to our lunch." But his companion laughed at that.

"Oh, you are used to hunger," she teased. "You got used to it in the war, you know. And it is so lovely up here in the Park. So let us stay a little while. There is no hurry."

As though in vehement denial of that, the car gave a sudden burst of speed; but she seemed to ignore it. Leaning back, she said, with a sigh:

"I can feel for you, dear Prince, for I, too, lost everything in the war." He turned on her a startled glance.

"Everything?"

"My husband."

"Ah," he said, in a tone of relief. "Yes, that is bad. A woman like you should have a husband every night. But at least he did not leave you poor. You have much money behind you, dear lady." A faint glimmer of light came in her blue eyes.

"Millions," she murmured. And that one word seemed to impel him closer still.

"And what will you do with these millions?"

he asked. She answered, with a shrug and a sigh:

"Oh, I haven't the slightest idea in the world. I can see such a little way ahead. Of one thing only I am sure." She turned with a confiding smile. "In this next week, I am going to spend many thousands of dollars upon clothes." He smiled straight back at her.

"Splendid, dear child. How good it is to have always the means to buy what you like and go where you will. I should like to go with you to Paris and Rome, to Venice and the Côte d'Azur."

"Tell me about them!" And for some time they talked of various places abroad. Then from the front seat the little chauffeur, by the aid of the small mirror before him, shot back a desperate appeal. And the Prince suggested again to his friend:

"Could you not now take a little lunch?" But to this the lovely young widow replied by a pettish toss of her shingled head.

"How can you speak of food again, when you can so plainly see I am dying of curiosity still?"



I ask you for a little help in planning out a trip abroad. I beg you to confide in me—the whole long story of your life! And you reply by speaking of lunch!” Her small boot began tapping the floor of the car. With a quick look and resigned little sigh, her huge companion answered:

“But I have told you.” She interrupted.

“Only of the war!” she exclaimed. “I wish you to tell me of balls at Court—great ladies—all your love affairs!”

“I have never had a love affair until today,” the Prince replied. “I was a mere boy before the war.”

“Oh, no, you were nineteen!” she cried. For he had mentioned that before. “You can give me all I am hungry for—not lunch but life—with all the fascinating details that come with a birth and breeding like yours!”

With a look not quite so patient now, he complied with her request. As ’round and ’round the Park they sped, he told her of his boyhood—of French and English tutors and his old Tartar peasant nurse, of bear and wolf hunts later

on, wild troika rides across the snow, of house parties of fifty or more, of balls in Moscow, army life. With a warm vivacity, she questioned still and drove him on. At last, however, he stopped short, with a resolute set of his great jaws.

“But all this was long ago. Dear lady, little is left to me now—little but what I offer to you—my name, my life, my love,” he said. “Please make me happy. Be my wife.”

Demurely she had bent her head, and the mischievous light in her clever blue eyes was invisible to the man at her side. But now, as she looked slowly up, she seemed dazzled and humbled by what he had said.

“A princess—I?” she murmured.

“Why not?” Eagerly he took her hand. “And let me love you, all your life! This will be easy for me, dear child, for already I love you very much! I can love you as you should be loved!” But as he moved abruptly closer, she stopped him with uplifted hand.

“I could never be a princess without a fortune, too!” she said. “Millions of dollars!”

“The millions are here!”

“A big, beautiful house!”

“You shall have it!” he said.

“And a car like this!”

“You shall have it at once!”

Once more she looked slowly up at him.

“Are you sure?” she demanded. “Are you sure we have not already had it too long?” And with a quick, searching smile, she asked: “Does Poltovsky know we’re out?”

“Poltovsky!” He gave a violent start; and as he stared at her now, both their expressions rapidly changed. Off went the masks. Her manner grew brisk and businesslike.

“Yes, Isador Poltovsky. On my last trip, he took me out in this same car one evening—and sold me several hundred gowns!”

“Hundreds!”

“Not for me, my dear, I toil for others,” she replied. The great black eyes of the Prince Borissovitch seemed popping almost out of his head.

“Who are you? What are you?” he cried.

“A buyer for B—— and B——” she said,

naming a large Chicago store. "And unless I am mistaken, dear Prince, you were with us on our ride that night. Were you not Poltovsky's chauffeur?"

"Oh, yes," he answered quietly. His eyes had settled back again; and if she had expected him to be confused, she was disappointed. With a look of calm reproach, he asked her: "Why did you deceive me so?"

"How have I deceived you?"

"Millions back of you, you said."

"And so they are," she answered, "but they belong to B—— and B——."

"Ah," said the Prince, "this is a pity." She shot a quick look at him, intrigued and attracted by his calm.

"You take it very quietly," gently she admonished him. He shrugged his mammoth shoulders.

"Why not? Life is like that," he answered. "I find a lovely young widow with money. I wish to have her for my wife. Now I find the money is not there. What a pity. But dear lady, you are as lovely to me still. I forgive you for deceiving me."

“You forgive me?” she demanded. “And on your side of this little affair, have you no guilty conscience?”

“None whatever,” he replied.

“None? After telling me all those lies?”

“But I told you no lies.”

“You are a real prince?” He smiled sadly at that.

“My adorable child, in Russia no prince is any longer real today. Most of us are already chauffeurs—or if we are not, we shall be soon. But all the life I have described, this life I have lived,” he declared.

“You served the Grand Duke in the war?”

“As his chauffeur. I could drive him at the speed he loved, and we had wild rides together, all along the Russian front. They are gone—and so is the world I knew. It will never come back. But why be sad? It is foolish. So I come to New York, and become chauffeur to the new Grand Duke, Poltovsky. But I do not like Poltovsky, and so last month I turn over my job to this little Baron Boboroff, my friend, who till then was nearly starved to death. And he is becoming uneasy now—for Poltovsky may

soon require his car, and this crest on the door must first disappear."

"You put that on for me?" she asked.

"Quite easily," the Prince replied. "A little trick of the chemical art. I put it on in such a way that quickly it may be washed off."

"Too bad it must be washed off," she answered. He gave her a rueful little glance, like that of some big dog, who sees a bone being taken away.

"The fairy tale is over," he said. But on her bright, attractive face came a mingled look of liking and curiosity and regret.

"Poor Baron. Poor Prince. Now let us lunch. Please both come and lunch with me," she said.

"No, now it is too late," he replied. "For remember we must first remove all sign of nobility from this car, before Poltovsky enters it." Her lips gave a twitch of amusement at that.

"But the new Grand Duke would love it," she said. He smiled back at her slowly. Then



all at once, the first spark of a new idea kindled in his enormous black eyes.

“He would, dear lady, you are right. And he is not alone in that. There are many such Grand Dukes in New York.”

“Then why not please them? Give the public what it wants!” The look of the Prince was enigmatic.

“We shall see,” he replied. “A quite new little plan begins to come into my head, and perhaps I shall tell it to you tonight. Please dine with me at the *Club Russe* and let us dance together again.”

“You still wish to dance with me?” He lifted his great eyebrows.

“Why not? Without the money,” he said, “you are quite as lovely as before.”

## CHAPTER II

So they dined that night at the *Club Russe*, and he unfolded his plan to her. He began by speaking of New York.

“There is not such a city like this in the world. Moscow, Vienna and Paris and Rome—I knew them well,” the Prince declared. “They were old, they were soft, finished affairs. Here nothing is finished and nothing is soft. This city is new and hard like the steel, and its very buildings keep reaching their faces hungrily up into the sky. Every one in them is doing the same, all mad with the wish to be new Grand Dukes. And this is amusing for one like me. For in Russia I saw a whole civilization of the Grand Dukes tumble down. It is amusing to watch a new one rise so quickly and madly here, and to wonder a little how it may end. I care for money—yes, my dear; it can make a man so comfortable. But I care still more to watch the show—the Gold Show of America. I would like

only to be in some place where I could watch and listen here to the comedies, the tragedies—the kaleidoscopic melodrama of this life!”

He leaned over the table as he talked. His dark, monstrous features were softened by a whimsical smile, but his big eyes seemed to glow, as though watching some great picture screen. Russian and Tartar, utterly strange, they made his young companion think of the tales of the Arabian Nights. She was curious, yet unafraid, a woman of business for ten keen years, and knowing how to take care of herself.

“I should like to watch and listen to this town with you!” she said.

“Why not?” He leaned close. “Let me tell you my plan. These people are restless, they cannot keep still, they must be moving all the time, both in the day and in the night. And so, if you would watch them, there is no position better than the place of a chauffeur. And I could be happy as a chauffeur if you were sitting at my side!” She threw back her head and laughed at him. “But this is quite possible,” he said. “I could be a chauffeur in this

city and you could sit in the place at my side—for you would be the lady's maid."

"The lady's maid!"

"Only in the car, dear child, to help prepare the setting for the Gold Show," he replied. "And with a small mirror and dictaphone, we could watch and listen to the new Grand Dukes behind." With a puzzled little frown, she demanded:

"What in the world are you talking about?"

"The life of this city," he replied, "which I would like to watch with you. And this can easily be arranged, with enormous profit to us both."

"Go on," she commanded. He smiled at her.

"You are a clever woman of business. Have you not some money saved?" Her expression grew cautious.

"Perhaps I have."

"Many thousands!"

"A few."

"It is enough. For with this I propose that you buy on instalments a car even richer than

that of Poltovsky, a car so rich that it shall be like one that Grand Dukes ride in," he said. "A car de luxe—it shall be quiet, speaking softly and discreetly, informing the world, 'Great wealth is here.' A car so rich that it must have a lady's maid with the chauffeur, as was the custom in my country in the days before the war. You shall be that lady's maid, dear lady, for our fairy tales; but you shall be the owner, too, and director of our enterprise. We shall hire your car for one hundred dollars a day, or a night, or even an hour—to the new Grand Dukes of New York, to the very newest of them all! To these hungry reachers for money, dear child—some, greedy like vultures and cruel like the hawks; some, clever, gay adventurers; and others, only things to smile at—people of the Arabian Nights! This city is full of such people as these, who, for some little business scheme or some adventure of amour, will greatly wish it to be supposed that each one owns a car like this, and so must be a millionaire! In this car, for a day or a night or an hour, each one will enter the Gold Show and proceed to play

his part! And we shall watch and listen, my dear!”

She stared at him, intrigued and amused, and he even saw a little excitement kindling in her brilliant eyes.

“What a wonderful, thrilling idea!” she exclaimed. “But how shall we find them, these new Grand Dukes?”

“Discreetly, dear lady,” he replied. “Loud advertising would make our car too well known for what it is. So the news must be only whispered around. Our agents will be the doormen at rich hotels and wild cafés. We shall have wild customers at times.” His big eyes twinkled as he spoke. “But the car itself must not be wild; it must have a rich, refined repose. Its fittings must be exquisite. All this I can leave to you. I know that you would do it so well.” Watching her, he saw the intentness that suddenly crept into her look; he could see she was already planning it out; he could see she was tempted. He added simply: “My part will be only the crest on the door.”

“The crest?” she inquired.



“Oh, yes,” he answered, “and a new one every night. For each one of our customers will wish to have a coat of arms, or at least his initials of ownership, nicely embossed upon the door. And this I know well how to do. I shall make the crests to order,” he added, with his whimsical smile, “such crests as the world of heraldry has never dreamed of until now.” She gave a little laugh at that. “Are you not tempted a little?” he asked.

“Oh, terribly tempted!” she exclaimed. Then the cautious look came again on her face, and she said, with a regretful sigh: “But it’s frightfully risky, all the same—and I’m afraid that I had better stick to this good, safe job of mine.” He leaned closer and asked gently:

“But are you so sure your job is safe?”

“What do you mean by that?” she demanded.

“Safe for you,” he answered. “For you are a very lovely girl, and your job will not be safe for you, if it destroys your loveliness—and makes you old before your time.”

“You mean that I already look old?”

“No, no, dear child—never, I’m sure, have

you been so lovely as tonight! But think, please think what it may do! Think what you have seen it do to women in such a business as yours!" She gave a little start at that. "And if it makes them quickly old, the job is not safe for them!" he declared. "And least of all for a woman like you! Do you never grow sick of your job? Do you like to do business with all the Poltovskies?"

"With some of them I do," she said, "and some of them are my good friends. But some have treated me badly of late." He glanced sharply up at this.

"You have seen Poltovsky this afternoon?"

"I have."

"Did you like him?"

"I did not."

"You see? You need a change," he said. "When a woman begins to dislike her work, then quickly she grows old, my dear. Already perhaps you were thinking of this, when you told me you would go to France."

"But that was only for a few months! I could still come back again to my work!"

“And so you can, dear lady, from this adventure I propose. When it is over, sell your car; and the little money lost will be far less than what you would spend in the trip to Paris which you plan. Moreover, this loss will be small for you, compared to the great profit, my dear. For the profit will be not only in money but also in the fairy tales—the fresh youth it will bring to you, the fresh, new interest in life!” He leaned closer. “Please try my plan!” he begged. She looked back in a curious, quizzical way.

“You feel sure I will be quite safe with you?”

“Yes, you will be quite safe,” he said. “You are a very lovely girl, but also you are a woman who gets only what she wants. I shall be exactly what you want.” And he smiled disarmingly. “Your husband, your lover or only your friend.”

“My business partner,” she said. She was smiling straight back across the table. Blunt, whimsical, kindly, he did not seem a man to be afraid of. Was he really a prince? But prince or not, here was a man, she told herself,

who had intimately known the ease and the refinements of life. And she liked him—very much. “Yes, I could manage him,” she thought. As though reading her thought, he went steadily on:

“Your business partner—as you will.” He leaned closer again. “But, dear lady, it will be such a business as you have never seen before! With me, you will be quite safe, as I said; but the safety will be all confined to the front seat of our car! Behind, it will not be so safe! In our small mirror you shall see reflected, as upon a screen, adventures of the Gold Show—and some of them will be quite wild!” He gave a comical little shrug of his enormous shoulders. “For I have always been like that. Though I am a very quiet man, such things have a way of happening—always—when I am about. They come like bees around my head!”

Suddenly, without warning and a barbaric crash of sound, the jazz band in the café burst into action. He arose.

“Think it over. Now come. Let us dance,” he proposed.

And while they danced, she thought it over. "With me you will be quite safe," he had said; and holding her lightly and easily now, he made her feel like that in his arms. "But with me you will see some things quite wild." She scented adventure. And all her days, since she was born, Claire Cobb had been adventurous. A wild little girl in a small town, down in southern Illinois, she had eloped at eighteen to Chicago with a wild young husband. There had come hard and baffling years, things had gone from bad to worse, until the war had taken him. And after his death she had fought her way up from the very bottom alone, up through the ruthless grind of business into a gay, hard world she adored. Yes, but she'd been getting stale of late; and there had come, in these last months, trouble with one of her employers. "Yes, I'm sick of it all, I do need a change, I need something to happen," she told herself. And in her huge companion's gleaming, whimsical black eyes she saw a light prodigiously gay, which seemed to say: "This world is by no means stale, my dear! Here everything

can happen still! I'm the kind that things do happen to!"

They came back to their table, and calmly he offered her a cigarette. He lighted it and then his own.

"Well? And my plan?" he inquired. She smiled.

"I am still thinking it over," she said. "It's nothing to dash into without some good hard thinking first. There are many details—on the business side." Claire Cobb was smoking rapidly.

"You can buy on instalments, as I said."

"I'd thought of that—and of other things." Her manner was brisk and businesslike. With her quick, clever eyes intent, she gave a frowning little smile. "I don't care to make any promises yet—none at all—I'll need more time. But I like your plan—it appeals to me!"

"You are wonderful! I am glad!" he said. "For I think I can feel how you will decide! We shall see this city in a way nobody has ever seen it before! The City of the Arabian Nights!"

Claire Cobb was smiling at him still.

“We might call it the Car of Croesus,” she said.

And so began their partnership.

### CHAPTER III

ONE afternoon about two weeks later, in front of a large New York hotel, a smart town car stood by the curb. Long and low, with rounded hood of polished black and a body of rich deep maroon, with fawn-colored upholstery, gleaming silver fittings and lustrous sable rug inside, it seemed to be the *dernier cri* in luxury and elegance—most impressively refined. In the chauffeur's seat the Prince, dressed in maroon livery, made a striking figure, huge in size, with his dark, blunt, enormous visage, arched and heavy eyebrows and great, wide-set coal-black eyes. He had at last persuaded Claire Cobb to join him in this enterprise and play the rôle of lady's maid; and by the aid of a mirror along the top of the windshield and a dictaphone discreetly concealed, these two were enabled to see and hear what happened in the car behind. Claire Cobb was living at this hotel, and the Prince was waiting for her now.



She appeared at the entrance presently, a young blonde of medium height, svelt, seductive and demure, in her costume of lady's maid, chic and French to the last degree. And her clever, warm, alert blue eyes were smiling, as she took her place in the car at the Prince's side.

"The chambermaids on my floor," she confided, "are wild with curiosity. I enter my rooms like a perfect lady and come out as a lady's maid. 'If I don't learn who the hell she is,' I heard one of them say today, 'I'm go'n' to lie down an' kick an' scream! They can take me off to Matteawan!' The guesses and the whispers buzz along the hallways! All the floor matrons are in it now and the house detective is on my trail!" The Prince Borissovitch chuckled deep.

"Yes, the fellow has come to me," he replied, "and I told him all he needs to know, on the pledge that he keep it to himself. And so soon as he learned of our enterprise, he thought he might bring us some customers. For this detective fellow is also bootlaiggair for your hotel, and through this profession he has made the

acquaintance with some of the most distinguished people in New York. Two of them are now at the Ritz; and there we may be needed soon for a wedding, he has told me, to take the bride and groom away.”

As the Prince Borissovitch gave her this news, a gleam of anticipation came into his monstrous, ironic black eyes. But whatever he saw in prospect here, he kept strictly to himself. To her eager curiosity, with a tantalizing smile he replied that she must be patient and all would be clear. During their talk, the car had moved but a few feet away from the hotel door. And the house detective now came out, with a smiling, plump, well-dressed young man, who had a round and rosy face, two gold teeth and a little moustache, which he stroked caressingly, as he took a look at the car.

“My God, Charley, it’s a wow!” he murmured to the man at his side. And then, raising his hat to Claire Cobb and disclosing a polished pink bald head, he remarked contentedly: “Your car’s the world’s last wow of refinement, Mademoiselle from Armentières. It’s just the cais-

son that we need—and your friend from Russia looks as though he could keep it rolling along tonight. What do we have to pay for all this?”

“A hundred dollars an hour,” she said. He gave an amused little smack of his lips, and her manner grew a bit severe. “As a rule, we like to be paid in advance.” At this he promptly produced a roll, from which he extracted five crisp new bills.

“We’ll need about five hours,” he said. At her glance of surprise as she took the five hundred, he smiled again and added: “We’ve got an awful lot to do. But thank Jehovah, little girl, you look as though you could put it through.”

“What do you want of me?” she asked.

“Oh, you’ll learn it all as time goes on,” blandly he replied to that. “I’ve got a couple of friends at the Ritz, who seem to want to get married tonight. The groom, I may add, is on his way to becoming a clerical man. We’d better go right down there now and see what they need of you.”

So they started down town, but on the way he had them stop before a small church.

“Here’s where I get out,” he said, “and subsidize a preacher to marry my clerical friend tonight. Now, sweetheart, when you reach the Ritz, go up to Suite 432. Here’s my card, so they’ll let you in. They’ll tell you what they want of you; and when you’ve got it all down pat, you can pick me up again at Brook’s, where I’ll be shopping for the groom. Remember every minute counts. And don’t get excited. Keep your head.”

With a friendly little wave of his hand, he strolled past the church to the rectory; and they went on down to the Ritz. Claire Cobb was exceedingly curious now.

“Who is that plump little idiot, and where do I come in on this?” she demanded of her friend. But the Prince was reticent still.

“This I have no time to explain. I know only that this gentleman and his clerical friend at the Ritz move in the best circles of the Grand Dukes of New York,” amiably he answered. “And I think that you shall soon be a very busy young

woman, my dear; for already I have promised them that you will manage everything.”

She glared at him, but he only smiled. They arrived at the Ritz. She went quickly in—and came out in half an hour more excited than before.

“Who are these people?” she demanded. “And what, in the name of common sense, do they want with a wedding like this?”

“Possibly they are in love with each other,” answered the Prince, with his whimsical smile. “And then what do they want with the common sense?”

She made a little face at him.

“Wait till you’ve heard!”

“Dear lady, tell me—please,” he said.

“I found the would-be clerical man doing his best to soothe the bride. They were throwing cold hands to calm her down. The bride is a pretty little thing, willowy to the last degree. And I remembered her at once. She used to be a model at Thurn’s, in the days when I did business there. She remembered me, too, and fell on my neck, and said I was the one she’d been

looking for—for she had not one stitch of clothes, excepting what was on her back. She was so excited and strained that it took some time to quiet her. The groom was tall and slender, with a clever, gay, amusing face. He told me that he liked me so much he had a little keepsake for me—and he proceeded to hand out another hundred dollar bill! That was for my time, he said. But speaking of time reminds me!” She glanced at her wrist watch. “It’s three o’clock! All I’ve got to do between now and tonight is to buy a full trousseau for the bride, and trunks and bags and jewel case and a couple of thousand dollars worth of any jewels that catch my eye! He said that he liked rubies best. Then I’m to get white satin ribbon, with which to decorate the car; and when that’s done, I’m to hurry right back and get the chef and florists here busy in the small crystal ballroom, where the wedding’s to take place—with supper for a hundred guests!”

The enormous prince-chauffeur gave a little purr of content.

“Oh, this is very Russian,” he said. “In just such a way we threw money around us in the

days before the war. But who shall be these guests, dear lady?" His pretty companion threw up her hands.

"That's another little job for me! I've got to provide them! Dressed for their parts!" The Prince chuckled sharply.

"Croesus!" he cried. "But this would seem impossible!"

"Oh, no, it isn't," she replied. "I thought that out on my way downstairs. Nothing's impossible in this town. It's full of young ladies ready to come to any free supper party on earth!" She blew a wisp of hair from her brow, and her warm blue eyes became intent. "Yes, I can get the guests, all right—and they'll be a wow of refinement, too! Only for God's sake, step on the gas! Our plump little friend will be waiting at Brook's!"

They found him waiting just outside; and as soon as he caught sight of the car, he waved to the doorman, who came out with three large boxes in his arms.

"Clothes for the groom," the plump one explained. "Now, sister—got your orders?"

"I have."



"Then let's go. I've got the cash."

His supply seemed inexhaustible. In shop after shop, he kept paying it out; and the more she spent, the more pleased he grew.

"You'd make a wife that I could be proud of," he informed her gratefully. "Call me Chester, won't you, dear? And when we come to the veil for the bride, remember she's a shy little thing and the veil has got to be thick enough so it hides her face like a bush. She's to wear it all through supper, too, and right out into the car."

"Into the car?" demanded Claire.

"Now, sweetheart, never mind about that. Let's just stick to business and pull off a big success."

So they went on to other shops, for jewelled slippers, travelling clothes, trunks, bags and jewel case and jewels—about two thousand dollars worth. And Chester, smiling at her side, kept pulling out roll after roll, till Claire remarked with irony:

"You're thinner than you were at noon."

"Oh, I've plenty of dough left on me yet,"



the little man answered cheerfully. "And I'd give my last cent for this buddy of mine—and a little of my life blood, too. But we won't let the crimson tide flow, if we can help it."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Claire in alarm. He gave her a reassuring pat.

"Now, Mademoiselle from Armentières, don't *parlez vous* about tonight. Just tell Prince Ivanowsky to keep that caisson rolling along, and the chances are a thousand to one we'll all get through the night alive. So let's not worry any more. Now, have you got her all fixed up?"

"I have."

"You're absolutely sure," demanded Chester wistfully. "No little cuties been left out—chemises, nighties, gamps, insertions? How about a vanity bag?"

"I've got that, too."

"Good little Claire. You think of simply everything. Now, let's get ribbons for the car—white satin and big ones, understand. You've got to get this car dressed up so it says bride and says it loud. And don't forget those hundred guests."

"I've got them," said Claire placidly. Her plump companion gave a start.

"Good gracious, dearie, where in hell?"

"Oh, I've picked them up in the various shops  
、 —all models and old friends of mine. They'll be at the Ritz in their very best clothes, with any young gentleman friends not averse to a little free supper tonight."

"But nice ones, sister, understand," Chester warned her earnestly. "No rough stuff here. This whole affair has got to be so nice and quiet and refined that it will suit my clerical friend and help to give the thing a tone. Now do your stuff and I'll do mine. Go and get a nice little supper now and a few good drinks from the chef at the Ritz. Here's my card. He's an old friend of mine. And when you're feeling nice and comfy, stagger down to the ballroom, dear, and see that those experts go the limit in flowers and ferns and caviar. Let's make that supper some real lunch. And I'll send around some choir boys, to help my friend the rector strike the true religious note. Now drop me here and tell the groom his clerical whiskers are in that

box. You may not see me at the Ritz—but don't worry. I'll be hovering 'round. And I'll meet you later at the dock."

"Dock! What dock?" demanded Claire.

"Not night court, sister, ocean liner," he said, beaming. Then he was gone.

## CHAPTER IV

At ten o'clock that evening, the Prince sat waiting in the car, near the side entrance of the Ritz. Some time before, the wedding guests had arrived in taxis or on foot, fittingly gorgeous in evening clothes, and had gone into the hotel. And since then, with a calm expectancy, he had watched the glamorous life of the street. The long immaculate Car of Croesus, festooned with satin ribbons tonight, drew curious glances now and then from quite a number of young men, some of them rather shabbily dressed but others in spruce evening clothes, who kept strolling carelessly by. A ragged old beggar came close to the car, and, stretching up his dirty hand, whined out softly some appeal. The Prince bent over and gave him a dime and murmured:

"Your costume is perfect, *mon vieux*. How many of them now are here?"

"About forty," was the low reply.

“Ali Baba!” chuckled the Prince. “Forty to one—it is too much! Please do not forget to count me in!”

And as the old beggar shuffled away, the huge chauffeur took off his thick gloves and lovingly fingered the old army gun in a pocket of his livery. “Ah, yes, this is all quite Russian,” he thought, with a little sigh of content.

A shrill whistle made him start. But it was only the doorman at the side entrance of the Ritz. For Claire Cobb had just come out. She was dressed as a lady’s maid still; and as the car slid softly up, he saw that she bore the vanity bag and the jewel case and cloak of the bride. Quickly she put them in behind and then stepped into her place at his side.

“Thank Heaven, *that’s* over!” she declared. “From various dark and awful hints that little Chester dropped today, I thought it might get rather rough!” Her enormous companion only smiled and looked lightly up and down the street.

“I am glad that all went so smoothly,” he murmured.

“Absolute perfection!” she cried. “Guests, ballroom, supper, choir boys, clergyman and bride and groom! And the groom, my dear—the groom was dressed as a smart Episcopal clergyman, too! And he wore a gold *pince nez* and a dapper little pointed beard! Now what do you make of *that* disguise?” But before he could answer, she clutched his arm. “Here they are! They’re coming!” she breathed.

A sudden commotion around the door; and then, with a rush and a chorus of cries and a shower of old slippers and rice, out came the tall, slender groom and his bride. Gayly he pushed her into the car; and as it moved away at once, he caught her into a loving embrace. The bride, without a moment’s delay, began to kiss him passionately. And watching them in the long mirror in front, Claire Cobb gave a little frown of disgust at this public display of their amour.

“Well,” she remarked, “for a shy little thing, she’s starting it off with quite a bang!” At this last word, the chauffeur winced.

“Please do not say such things!” he smiled. “I find myself superstitious tonight!”

But his young partner did not hear. She was too busy watching the pair of ostentatious lovers behind. The bride's veil completely covered her face. The spruce and dapper groom was dressed like a fashionable young clergyman; but while they continued to embrace and gaze lovingly into each other's eyes—low, sharp and clear, these words came out to the maid and the chauffeur, through the small tube from the dictaphone:

“Can you see through your veil?”

“I can, Big Boy!”

“Then watch my side and I'll watch yours!” She leaned over, as though for another embrace, and exclaimed in a low, frightened voice:

“My God, Mac, their whole mob's here!”

“Let 'em be here. What the hell?” retorted the groom with a languishing smile. “They ain't a-go'n' to spot us in this chariot—not a chance. But they sure have gathered some collection of booze babies here tonight! There's Lipsky and Butch and good old Red, and Renny the Frenchman and Irish Joe——”

“I'm go'n' to scream in a minute, Big Boy!”

“If you do, we won't live very long,” he re-

plied. And he ardently buried his face in her veil. "This is no armored car, little girl. Better lie low and stay alive." She clutched him.

"Oh, Mac, I don't want to be dead! Let's leave 'em alone after this, Big Boy! Let 'em have this territory!"

"They can have it, Sweetikins," he said, with another fond smile and a hand on his heart. "I've got their eighty-three grand right here."

"For God's sake, what's it all about?" demanded Claire Cobb in the front seat.

"Croesus!" fervently murmured the Prince. "We may soon be a funeral!"

For, while still close to the hotel, the car had been caught in a traffic jam; and two of the careless young strollers near by now sauntered up with impudent grins and looked inquisitively in. But the groom had switched off the light inside and taken the bride tight into his arms, so that both of their faces were concealed. And the inquisitors turned away.

"Mac, I'll yell! I'll howl an' scream! I just can't stand it!" whimpered the bride.



"Shut up!" said the young clergyman, as he pressed her to his heart.

"Where's Chester? Oh, where's Chester?" she sobbed.

"Right close by you, lady bird," whined a voice from the running board, as a dirty hand reached in for alms.

"Who's that old beggar?" whispered Claire.

"Ali Baba!" chuckled the Prince. The traffic jam was clearing now and he was getting the car away. But his companion gripped his arm.

"Tell me instantly!" she cried. "Who are these people, anyhow?"

"They are the highjackairs, my dear."

"Good Heavens! What are they doing here?"

"They escape from the bootlaiggairs they have robbed, and who are besieging them to-night," answered the Prince, with his great black eyes gleaming over his driving wheel. "Did I not warn you, dear girl," he went on, "that sometimes it would be like this? All my life it has been so. I am a very quiet man, but

the adventures come like bees—they come and buzz around my head! Ah! Now here comes one more of them!”

For as the Car of Croesus, crossing Madison Avenue, started east with gathering speed, one of the inquisitors, who had suspiciously followed them still, suddenly leaped on the running board, close by the old beggar’s side. When she saw him, the bride started to scream. The groom quickly clapped one hand on her mouth and with the other drew a gun. But as he did so, the beggar man said:

“Don’t hurt him, Mac, he won’t do any harm. I’ve got my little silencer shoved right up against him now, right where his dinner ought to be.” The young stranger snarled at this, but the old beggar’s voice went cheerfully on: “It’s Winny the Wop. Better come along with us, Winny dear. If you jump, I’ll pump the lead right in and give you an awful tummyache. This little call was your own idea; but now that you’re with us, you’re go’n’ to come right along up to the Park.” The car was already two blocks from the Ritz, and Chester looked gayly

in on the groom. "Keep kissing her, Mac. Let's play it safe. Can you hear me, Prince?"

"I can."

"Then step on the gas and let her ride. Just keep this caisson rolling along! Thank God for Second Avenue," he added, as they turned up town, "where there ain't any little go-go lights nor any officers of the law! Better switch on the light again, Mac, and show the world it's a honeymoon! Winny makes it all complete! They'll spot him for best man, of course—he's all dressed up to play the part!"

The young Italian, dark and slim, in dinner clothes and a top coat, looked spruce enough but far from gay. In fact, he snarled again with rage. But the pistol pressed against his side kept him rigid and helpless there. The bride was whimpering with fright, but the groom had taken her into his arms, and he began to quiet her. Meanwhile the car rushed on up town and turned over to the Park. And when the mounted cop at the entrance threw a suspicious glance their way, the old beggar on the running board pulled off his dirty, ragged

hat and his false whiskers and revealed a visage plump and round and rosy.

"It's all right, officer!" gayly he called. "Just a little fancy dress affair!"

So on they went into the Park; and he added, to the man at his side:

"Now, Winny, don't be morbid, dear. Let's all be merry while we may."

"Yeh? You wait!" And the young stranger glared through the window at the smiling groom inside. "Yuh t'ink yer bot' so goddam smart yuh can grab five truck loads off our boys an' get away wit' it?" he sneered.

"We do seem to be, Winny," smiled the groom. "Pretty damn fine liquor, too. Brought a big price and it's all right here. Eighty-three Grand in all, my boy." The young Italian shook with fury.

"Yeh? So you sneak in Ritz to hide! But you can't hide—we find you there! An' we will find you still, by Christo, any goddam place you go!"

"Oh-h you go and sleep a while," cooed Chester; and his violent push sent the young Italian

headlong into a thick clump of bushes close beside the road. "Now keep her rolling, Prince!" he cried; and the big car gave a burst of speed that took them soon far from the spot. Then quickly he opened the door and got in. "Now pull down the shades," he blithely directed, "and let's get rid of a few of these clothes."

Promptly and deftly this was done. The beggar's garb, rolled into a ball, was thrown into some shrubbery; and with it went the bridal veil; while the small pointed beard and *pince nez* of the groom were carelessly tossed out into the night. Gayly the plump one produced a flask and offered it to the bridal pair. When his own turn came, he smacked his lips.

"Cognac—*dix-huit onze!*" he breathed. "But none too good for a health to the bride!"

At this, however, the little girl grew ominously tearful again. And so, when they reached the west side of the Park, he stopped the car near an entrance and said:

"Well, kids, I'm go'n' to leave you now. You'll want to be alone a while. I'll go down in the subway, Mac, and see that everything's

on board." He got out of the car, and in a low voice spoke to the enormous chauffeur: "Prince, take 'em up on Riverside and give her a chance to dry those tears. And then meet me at the dock—North River and Fifteenth Street."

And tenderly twirling his small moustache, the plump little man started briskly away.

But within the car, it was not so gay. For, alone with the groom, the slim young bride went all to pieces in his arms. With drawn curtains at the windows shutting out inquisitive eyes, she sobbed as though her heart would burst; and for some time nothing was heard but her cries and the murmured endearments of the groom. But later these snatches came through the tube to Claire and the Prince in the front seat:

"Can't you see that we're safe out of this, Hon?"

"We're not, we're not—we won't be! Sooner or later they'll get you, Mac! It's awful! It's a hell of a life! When I think what I gave up for you——"

“Oh, now, honey girl—after all—you were only a dressmaker’s cutie, at that.” But she did not seem to hear his reply; she was shaken again by a spasm of sobs.

“When you was trying to lure me away, didn’t you promise to marry me and stick to the decent side of the trade, with full police protection, Mac? And how have you kept them promises? You’re only a cheap highjacker now, grabbing stuff off of all your old pals! And they won’t stand it any more! They’ll get you, Mac, they’ll get you for this!”

“But how can they get me, Sweetikins, with the whole ocean between us?” he cried. “Ain’t we off on the *Ile de France* tonight? Wait till you see the cabin we got you! Wait till you see the three of us slapping the red on gay Paree! We’ll cut out the booze if you say so, dear, drink nothing but light wines and beer! And we’ll get you a nifty little Rolls Royce, and you can go the limit on clothes! Here—take a look at these!” he cried. And he jerked open the jewel case. “Just a few little samples of your wedding presents, dear!”



But this brought a fresh burst of tears.

“That’s the damndest part of it all!” wailed the bride. “This wedding stuff you pulled tonight!”

“But God almighty, little girl——”

“Ain’t it enough not to marry me—without faking up a show like that? Why get a dummy preacher, Mac—and choir boys—and choir boys? Those kids’ sweet voices got me going! Oh, gee, but I’m feeling rotten tonight!”

“But, Lou! That wedding was no fake!”

“Quit your kiddin’!” she sobbed.

“Now listen to me!” And he took her firmly by the arms. “I’ve always meant to marry you, Lou—I ain’t such a bad egg, at that! And I didn’t know if we’d live long tonight—so I hired a real preacher, dear!”

“Married?” she gasped.

“I’ll say we are! Ask Chester, if you don’t believe me. He’ll show you the papers—all O. K.”

“Married! Oh, Mac! Oh, Mother of God!”

With a queer, harsh cry of joy, the girl pressed suddenly into his arms. And so fast did she



recover, as the car sped on down town, that soon, sitting up with a virtuous air and deftly applying lipstick and powder to her pretty tear-streaked face, she was saying to her brand-new husband, in a coaxing matronly tone:

“Be good after this, for my sake, Big Boy, and go back to the decent side of the trade.”

“What? Pay for full police protection?” dubiously retorted the groom.

“Yes, and for the liquor, too! Aw, gee—let’s be respectable!” pleaded the anxious little wife. “Think of the future!” she implored. “Suppose we have a baby, Mac, like one of them sweet little choir boys! Be decent, Kid—come on—aw, gee! Go back to bootlegging and let’s be nice!”

“All right, all right—we’ll see, little girl,” cheerfully he answered. “But get this cloak around you now—it cost twelve hundred, Chester said.” It was of ermine and gold brocade. “For here we are right at the dock! And here’s old Chester!”

Sure enough. Plump, rosy, bald and affable, Chester swung open the door of the car.

“Trunks all on board,” he greeted them, “and I got everything fixed fine. Done business with this boat before. Seats at the captain’s table and steamer chairs on the sunny side. Here, Prince, here’s something for you and the dame.” And he held out one last crinkly bill. “You sure did keep that caisson rolling along for us tonight, and you deserve a Grand!” he said. “Remember me to Winny the Wop, next time you see him at the Ritz! Well, come on, kids, all aboard!”

And into the gay tumultuous throng of men and women in evening clothes, silk hats and gorgeous cloaks and furs, the three adventurers disappeared.

“Good-bye, Ali Baba,” murmured the Prince Borissovitch, with his ironical smile. And turning to Claire Cobb, he said: “Well, dear lady, and so we come safe through our first Arabian night!”

## CHAPTER V

LATE one night the following week, on a shadowy side street a little east of the Great White Way, a most impressively chic town car came softly up to the *Club Russe* and stopped close by the entrance door. It was nearly three in the morning and the street was empty, except for a few taxis and more pretentious vehicles ranged along the curbstone. But none could pretend to equal this newcomer in the line; and as the Car of Croesus stood discreetly purring, it seemed to be softly telling the world: "Great wealth is here. We are so rich that we don't *have* to make any noise." In front, beside the huge chauffeur in his impeccable livery, sat a trim young lady's maid, simply, expensively dressed in black. Claire Cobb and the Prince Ivan Borissovitch. Yakov, the tall Cossack doorman who stood in front of the café, recognized them with a slight start; but then, his brown and wrinkled face becoming impas-

sive as before, he drew near, with a stolid smile; and unobtrusively the chauffeur slipped some money into his hand; for Yakov had secured for them their customer this evening.

“Tell her the car is now waiting,” the Prince directed, in a low tone. “But be sure you speak in Russian, *mon vieux*, for her companion must not know.”

Old Yakov saluted and turned away. Meanwhile Claire Cobb had pressed a button that switched on a light inside the car, and she gave a careful scrutiny to the dove-colored upholstery, gleaming silver fittings and robe of lustrous sable lined with pale gray velvet, back there. Satisfied that all was in order, she started to switch off the light.

“Leave it, dear lady,” said the Prince. “Our customer will like it so.” His partner shot a curious glance and patted a weary little yawn.

“Now tell me more about her,” she said.

“Sonia Lupoushka is a little Polish *danseuse*,” he replied. “A very adorable child she is, as yet quite unspoiled by the life she leads,

though already she has the enormous success. Light and gay like an April breeze, she dances through such days and nights as would exhaust a horse, my dear. She dances here in the afternoon, and at ten in the evening she appears in one great act at the Russian Revue. After that, I am told, she is massaged and her coiffure is rearranged; and then at midnight she comes here and dances until three o'clock." Claire Cobb was smiling.

"What does she do with the rest of her evening? And what does she want of us tonight?" At her question, the big black eyes of the Prince twinkled with anticipation.

"This she has not entirely confided to me," he replied, "but from what I have learned, I can only suppose that she hopes to win a husband tonight."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Oh, yes, a clever young man on your Wall Street—what they call a Bull down there. Already he is exceedingly rich. He is one of the new Grand Dukes of New York." Over the monstrous face of the Prince flitted a slight,

whimsical smile. "And Sonia ardently wishes, I think, to become his Duchess now," he said.

"How old is she?"

"Twenty-two."

"How long has she known him?"

"About six months. He saw her dance one evening, and was captivated at once. Since then, he pursues her constantly."

"And has he been—successful yet?"

"Nothing, dear lady, of that I am sure. The thing may be difficult to believe, but I tell you that I know this girl; she is one who will not easily let herself be spoiled, my dear. Until now, the joy of her dancing has completely filled her life. Then comes this man; quite soon she learns of his rising Wall Street fame, and that in a few years from now he may be a great millionaire. Possibly on that account, she determines to become his wife and to refuse him what he wants until he agrees to marry her. But any such ambitious plan has been no cold and cynical calculation on her part; for she is quite wildly in love with him now; so that if she

fails in her purpose tonight, I cannot say what she may do.”

“But where do we come in on this? How does she wish us to help her tonight?”

“She will tell us she wishes nothing tonight.”

“What? Keep us up till three o’clock for nothing?”

“Oh, no,” the Prince replied. “Our regular hundred dollar fee will be paid us quite as usual.”

“But—what are we to do to earn it?”

“We are simply to be waiting here, when she comes out with the new Grand Duke. He will order a taxi of Yakov; but as they start to enter it, I shall come discreetly up and ask: ‘Then you do not need me tonight, Madame?’ And she will seem most indignant at that, and perhaps a little guilty, too. She will demand of me: ‘What do you mean? This is not my car! I have never seen it before in my life!’ So much she has rehearsed with me. What drama may follow, I do not know.”

His pretty companion stared at him, her bright, clever eyes now wide awake.

“And she’ll pay us one hundred dollars for that! What does she hope to gain by it?” With a slight lift of his heavy brows, the Prince Borissovitch replied:

“Possibly she wishes to awaken the jealousy of her friend. For of course he will not believe her, when she says the car is not her own.”

As he spoke, in spite of his huge bulk, the Prince stepped easily out of the car, and smiling back, extended his hand.

“Come now and look at my small work of art. I am feeling quite proud of it,” he said. And as she obeyed him, he explained: “I told you that some of our customers would desire a crest upon the door. And I told you I would make such crests as the world of heraldry has never conceived of until now. Such a one I have made for tonight.”

And he showed her, on the door of the car, a lovely tiny little design—of a joyous dancing nymph in the woods.

“Sonia’s crest,” he murmured. Claire Cobb gave a start of delight.



“And you mean that on seeing this,” she exclaimed, “the new Grand Duke will think at once that some other rich suitor is hovering ’round, giving Sonia motor cars!” The Prince turned on her his whimsical smile.

“Possibly he will,” he agreed. “But for that we shall have to be patient, my dear.”

They had not to be patient long. As the closing hour drew near, people came out in groups and couples. Silk hats and furs and jewelled slippers, gay chatter and the faint scent of perfumes. Suddenly the huge hand of the Prince lightly touched his companion’s arm, and she quickly turned her head. Out of the café entrance door, with a lean young man at her side—a man with a nervous, strong-set jaw and restless, able, friendly, gay eyes—there came a lithe little figure wrapped in ermine and white fox, thin and soft and clinging close to the lovely lines of her young form. She was a blonde, her glossy hair close cropped, almost like that of a boy; her dainty features small, piquant. Her blue eyes, set wide apart, showed not the slightest sign of fatigue but rather of

repressed excitement; mischievous and fresh as a child's, they were smiling joyously up at her friend. He spoke to Yakov, who turned away and signaled to a taxi; but meanwhile the Prince Borissovitch had come respectfully up, and he asked:

“Then you will not need me tonight, Madame?”

The effect was electrical. With a start of feigned dismay and a quick glance at her escort, she rejoined indignantly:

“What is it you mean by asking me that?” She spoke with a foreign accent. “Never haf I needed you—never once in all my life!” The Prince seemed astonished.

“But, Madame! Your car——”

“I haf no car! Never haf I seen it before! Go away, or I shall haf you sent at once to a prison!” she exclaimed.

“As you will, Madame.” He turned away.

“Stop, please, I want to know more about this!” said the girl's companion, in a low, sharp, ominous tone. She laid a desperate hand on his arm.

“There is nothing to know, Jeem darling!” she wailed. Her big eyes looked frightened, like those of a child—and of a very guilty child. And her companion took that in, with one quick, anxious, searching glance.

“Then why should he ask if you need him tonight?”

The poor little *danseuse* seemed completely confused. She stammered:

“I—I—I can only suppose——”

Abruptly he turned to the chauffeur.

“Where is this car?” he demanded. With a little lift of his eyebrows, the Prince submissively pointed it out. And as the new Grand Duke took in the car’s subdued magnificence, his strong, clever, nervous face grew quickly white with jealousy. Over the enormous visage of the Russian nobleman flashed such a smile of relish then, that just for the moment, huge and dark, he seemed like a Mephistopheles. But as the other turned sharply back, any such revealing gleam vanished completely, and once more he was the distressed and embarrassed chauffeur.

"It belongs to this lady?" the other demanded.

"No, no! Oh, *cher ami!*" she implored. But sternly he shook off her hand.

"Who's the owner, then?" he snapped.

"A lady, sir," the Prince replied.

"What lady? Damn you! This one here?"

"No, Jeem, *chéri*—oh, please, you are wrong! Let's go! Don't make a scene!" she begged, tears starting in her bright blue eyes. Already several people were listening to them, all intent; and noticing this, he turned with a frown.

"All right, let's go!"

He gripped her arm and led her toward the Car of Croesus. Shoving her quickly into it, he took one swift and furious look at the exquisite fittings inside; and then, switching off the light, he turned and ordered:

"Up to the Park!"

As he did so, he caught sight of that lovely little crest on the door. Instantly he bent close down, and caught the full significance of the tiny figure there, that elfin, joyous nymph in the woods.

“Here’s a lovely little thing!” he snapped.

The girl bent quickly over and gave another cry of dismay.

“Who can haf put this here?” she wailed. “I haf never seen it before in my life!”

“Up to the Park!” he ordered again, and closed the door of the car with a slam!

## CHAPTER VI

So up into the Park they went, and 'round and 'round at a slow speed, by dark, silent, winding roads, meeting only a taxi now and then, with couples in each other's arms. Around them, dim and far away, loomed palatial, vast hotels, their myriad windows darkened now, except for a few. Late revellers. Here only the purple glistening road, and the long low Car of Croesus, softly purring, as though content with the love drama played inside.

"I thought I'd seen some life in my time," murmured the maid to the chauffeur. "But little old Chicago was never like this!" He turned his dark enormous head and she caught the whimsical gleam in his eyes.

"Dear lady, since the era of the Arabian Nights," he replied, "this world has not so greatly changed. The Duke and the Wood Nymph, as before. Now let us watch and listen," he said.

Directly in front of them, over the windshield, discreetly and unobtrusively set, was a long, narrow mirror, which gave them a view of the two shadowy figures behind. And not always shadowy, for the hard blue light of the big park lamps flashed in upon them from time to time, and revealed the faces there. And through a curious little horn, set into the upholstered seat between the maid and the chauffeur, their sharp, excited voices came:

“It is not mine!” the nymph declared.

“Whose is it, then?”

“How shall I know? Never but once or twice, I suppose, haf I ever seen it before!”

“Oh! Then you *have* seen it before!”

A muffled little scream was heard.

“You are hurting me! Stop! Let go of me! How can I think when you hold me so?”

“I don’t want you to think—I want the truth! Sonia! Who gave you this car?”

“Nobody! It is not mine!”

“Then why did you lie to me at the start and say you’d never seen it?” he cried.

“Because you scare me—scare me so! I

know you will never belief the truth! Oh, Jeem, oh, Jeem! *Bien aimé!*”

The slim shadowy little form was huddled back in a corner now. The man bent toward her.

“What *is* the truth?”

“I do not know! I can only suppose it belongs to my friend—and she thought I might wish to use it tonight!”

“Then if it does *not* belong to you, why the dancing nymph on the door?”

“Because my friend—she dances, too!”

“Who is she?”

“I will not tell you that—because whether or not she owns this car I haf already told you I do not know—and I do not wish to slander her! Because if she owns such a car as this, I can only suppose it was given to her by some lover who is *très riche!* And this is shameful, this is wrong!”

“And you expect me to believe——”

“Oh, Jeem—oh, please—I tell only the truth! This much I will swear to you, *chéri*, before all the Blessed Saints—that the car belongs to a woman—not me!”



In front, the Prince chuckled with relish at that. "She is right, she tells only the truth!" he exclaimed. "The dear little monkey, not once has she lied! She can only suppose! But this supposing will quite soon drive out of his senses her poor friend!"

"I can only suppose," her voice went on, desperate, frightened, like that of a child, "I can only suppose that the car may be hers! It must be a woman who owns it, *chéri*, for what would a man want with a maid?" He started violently at that.

"Nothing! The maid is yours, of course!"

"She isn't! Oh, Jeem! You haf hurt me so! I tell you the truth, yet you think I would lie! You know my maid—you know Eugénie!"

"I do, but here's another one! And you've another apartment, no doubt—one you've never told me of! Now stop this lying and give me the truth! This car is yours! Who gave it to you?"

"Nobody!"

"You bought it, eh—special body and all—for twenty thousand dollars cash!"

"Oh, no—not for the cash, *chéri*! I would

never be so *stupid* as that! I can only suppose——”

“Suppose, suppose—you’ll drive me mad!”

“I can only suppose, if I bought such a car, I would buy it on the instalments, Jeem.”

“Lies and lies and lies again!”

She sprang at him then, her small hands clinched. A sudden glare of light from outside gave a picture of her heaving young breast. Lips quivering like those of a child, she faced him with big furious eyes. Then only a shadow as before. But her voice was sharply heard:

“Not once haf I lied—so help me the God! Stop treating me so! What haf I done? What haf I ever done with you that can give you a right to treat me like this? Haf I ever done anything shameful or wrong? Haf I taken the money from you, Jeem? Haf I not always earned my way? Feefteen hundred dollars a week I now earn! I suppose I can haf such a car if I like! Not once haf I had any shameful amour—but I suppose I can haf, if I like, some other friends but you in New York!”

“Who’ll give you cars and lady’s maids!”

But Sonia only laughed at that. Her anger, whether feigned or real, had vanished as quickly as it came; and she looked at him with amused disdain.

“Ah, *mon Dieu, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!* How *stupide*, how *bête* you are! Now I shall tell you one very true thing! Never would I take such a car from any man except my husband!”

“You’re married, you mean?” He gripped her arms till she screamed again. “By God,” he added, “if you are——”

But again she wrenched away from him.

“Did I say I am married? I did not. I tell you only the truth tonight. But I can swear to you, *gros piqueur*, that I think soon to marry, after this night!” In front, the Prince chuckled.

“She will!” he exclaimed.

“Oh, la, la,” she went on. “I am tired tonight. I haf lofed you so—and you pick on me so. I fear I am getting old, *mon cher*. Quite soon I shall be twenty-three—and then what will become of me? I work very hard and I cannot support such scenes as this, when I should be sleeping. It is nearly the morning

now. Please take me home and leaf me, Jeem."

"Not till you tell me who gave you this car!"

"And I tell you again it is not mine! But if you will not belief me, tomorrow you may find out for yourself! It is easy for a man like you to find who owns a car like this! Are you not a man of the town?"

"Oh, I'll find out soon enough!"

"Then why must you pick on me so? Bah! You haf been like a boor tonight! You haf been so inelegant, Jeem! Why did you not smile at me tonight and tomorrow employ a detective, *mon cher*? It would haf been so much more *comme il faut*."

"Thank you. I will." But the tone of his voice showed that he was weakening, and she was quick to press her point:

"And then you will see how *bête* you haf been! Can you think that I would lie to you, when my lie could so easily be found out? Haf I ever been so *stupide* as that? But never did you think of that! You fly instead into a rage—and I can no longer endure you so!"

The man leaned toward her.

“Sonia—wait! If I’ve been an ass, it’s only because I’m mad about you!”

Abruptly his whole tone had changed. But she had him where she wanted him now, and proceeded to enjoy herself.

“Oh, la, la—I am sick of your madness,” she cried, with an airy toss of her head. “We cannot go on any longer like this. It would drive us quite out of our senses soon. It is hard to be forced to prove every night to a man, who is not your husband, that you haf no other friend. And I will not haf it so. Many other bad times there would be like tonight. For how can you be sure of me, when we meet but for an hour like this, two or three times in all the week? Or how can I be sure of you? What can I know of your other times? What can I know of your Wall Street life? I can only suppose that possibly you haf some beautiful friend down there!”

He gave a sharp little laugh at that.

“My secretary? She’s forty-nine!”

“Oh, oh—oh, oh—how can I know?” wailed

the nymph, with a desolate roll of her head. "And what can I know of your life in the night? I can only suppose till it drives me insane! For I haf lofed you till tonight—and I haf been terribly hurt in my heart that you haf been ashamed of me so."

"Ashamed of you?"

"Haf you not been so? Haf you taken me to any fine houses, haf you presented me to your friends? I am not chic enough, it seems! And I am quite tired of it now! If you will be jealous, so shall I!"

"But I won't be! I promise you, darling girl!"

"I cannot belief in your promises! It must, it will always be so with you now—so long as we go on like this. For I must be free to do as I like. If I want other friends, I shall haf them now—friends who will be proud of me. I should like to haf some friends like that! And this is quite, quite possible! Haf I not the whole town at my feet? Just suppose for one moment how it has been—what friends I haf pushed off for you! They come by the thousands to see me dance! And many are *très*

*riche, mon cher*, and many wish to be my friends! How can I longer push them away? How can I help if they—what can I do?”

“You can give up your dancing! Haven’t I begged you?”

“Yes, you haf begged! But I’ll never agree! Never shall I be a girl like that! When I give up my dancing, it shall be only to become the wife of somebody who is proud of me!”

“You want me to marry you?” he demanded. She tilted her head with a critical air.

“That I do not know,” she replied. “Once I was crazy to marry you, Jeem—but I haf grown so tired of your *stupid* rage tonight—and that you are ashamed of me!”

“I am not ashamed!”

“You haf been so. You haf watched me dance in the theatre—and you haf looked around you there at all the wives of men like you—and often you haf said to yourself: ‘How much more clever than she is they are!’ ”

“Not for a minute, you dear little witch! They’re all stupid and dull, compared to you!” But Sonia paid no attention to that.

“You haf said: ‘How much more beautiful!



With what light, easy grace they move! How much more dainty and chic they are!’ ”

“It’s a lie! They’re a lot of fat old fools!”

“You haf said: ‘How much more learned and wise are these cultivated wives of my friends, who come each night to the *Club Russe*!’ For no matter how much they eat or they drink, or what noise they make when they talk or they laugh, they are the women of breeding, *chéri*! What elegance, compared to me! And so you haf been ashamed of me! Not once did you stop to ask yourself: ‘Could Sonia not dress so well? Could she not be more clever than they? Could she not be quick to learn? Could she not be a wife that I would be proud of?’ ”

“I tell you, I do! I’m begging you now—I’m begging you to marry me!”

“Ah, yes, but then you did not beg—for you were afraid, if we married, I would stick to you all of your life! And you told to yourself: ‘How *bête* she will be! When she gives up her dancing, how fat she will be!’ Never did you stop to imagine how, if I were in love with you, as I was until tonight, I might haf danced only



for you in your home—danced for you in such a way as never haf I danced before!”

He took her abruptly into his arms.

“You little darling!” he replied. “You’re going to dance for me just like that!”

“Oh, oh—now I do not know. You haf shown yourself so jealous tonight. I could not support to be treated like that.”

“I won’t be jealous—I’ll leave you free!”

“How free? To haf what friends I like?”

“What friends you like!” he glibly agreed.

“And must I give up my dancing, Jeem?”

“No, darling girl, you’ll dance for me!”

“*Mon Dieu!* My art might suffer so! No, I must be free to do what I like, go where I like, know whom I like! And that, I fear, you will never allow! To be tied to one man for all my life—and a jealous man! *Mais non, mon vieux!* Jeem, I think you had better let go of me!”

His answer was to hold her tighter, and his muffled voice was heard:

“What a heartless little wretch you are!”

“Heartless? Me? When I lofed you so? Stop kissing me, Jeem. It only annoys me. I

cannot care for you tonight. But until tonight I loved you so that I wished to be with you all of my life!"

"*Don't you love me that way now?*"

"How can I know? And if I do not, what can we do? I must be free to leave you, Jeem, if ever again you become so insane. Ah! Now I shall tell you what we may try! If you are quite bound to have me still, we may try an experiment marriage, Jeem!"

Then suddenly his laugh was heard.

"You've had a lot of fun with me, haven't you, you little witch?"

As she lay in his arms contentedly, she flashed a look up into his eyes.

"And is it a sin, a little fun?"

"But you lied and lied and lied and lied! For you love me as madly as I love you!"

"*Ah, non, mon Dieu!* That is saying too much!"

"*Please say too much!*" He kissed her again; and his words, impassioned, swift and low, were quite indistinguishable to the listeners in the front of the car. But in a few moments, soft

and clear, her voice once more came out to them:

“I am lofing you a little, Jeem. It is a great surprise to me but I am beginning to lofe you now. I begin to think I shall agree to try marrying you for a little while—if you are quite sure you will lofe me well.”

They did not hear the man’s reply; but the long narrow mirror in front of them gave a picture of two dim figures sharply locked together tight. A low radiant laugh was heard, and then a blissful little sigh:

“Ah, Jeem! *Mon Dieu!* Perhaps—who knows? I may find I must stay with you all of my life! I’m beginning to feel just a little so!”

“You darling child!”

“I can only suppose I am dancing up into the stars tonight!”

Then over the dark, enormous face of the chauffeur, the Prince Borissovitch, came a smile of satisfaction; and with a gleam of relish in his great black eyes, he said:

“So the new Grand Duke will take a bride!”

## CHAPTER VII

ON a gray cloudy afternoon toward the end of October, through an uproarious tenement street teeming with humanity, down on the Lower East Side of New York, slowly and very carefully the Car of Croesus ploughed its way; and over the blunt features of the Prince Borissovitch spread an expression of grim distaste; for he had never come before into this section of the town. At the odors of garlic, he wrinkled his nose; and with a puzzled look in his eyes, he turned to his partner, Claire Cobb, the trim young lady's maid at his side. Though they had been partners but a few weeks, already their enterprise was a success. Not only were they making a hundred dollars or more a day; they were getting intimate glimpses, too, into many little dramas, comedies and tragedies of the tumultuous city's life. But today the Prince could see no chance of doing any business here among these dirty tenements.

“Shall we find a customer down here, who will hire such a car as ours?” he asked, in an incredulous tone. Claire Cobb smiled quickly up at him.

“Oh, yes, we’ll find a customer.”

“And he will pay our price?”

“He will.”

“But why?” the Prince demanded. A curious light came suddenly into her bright, clever eyes; and in a softened voice, she said:

“So that he may tell a fairy tale.” At the puzzled look on the Prince’s face, she smiled again and went on to explain: “When I was in the clothing business, I met a good many wolves in New York—but now and then I met a lamb—and one of them was Benny Gluck. If Gluck means luck and happiness, then Benny had a joke of a name; for all the misfortunes in Greater New York seemed always to turn in at his door. It had been so for twenty years. Ever since his father came from Galicia, when Benjamin was only fifteen, they’d had a grinding, hopeless fight, which at last had worn the old man out. I never met him. For over two

years, he has been in a sanitarium. I heard about him the other day, when I looked up Benny at the shop. Now his father is coming back to town, and we are to meet him at the train."

"But why in such a car as this?"

"So that his son may tell him that fairy tale I spoke of."

The first scene of the tale was dark. The car drew up in a foul-smelling street before a tall, dirty tenement. A slim little man stood waiting there. Well dressed in a quiet, neat blue suit, he looked like a prosperous business man; but his dark face was tensely lined and he had bright, anxious, tragic eyes. At sight of Claire Cobb, his features lit up in an eager, friendly smile. Quickly he came and wrung her hand.

"*Gott sei dank!* I thought you were not coming already! I thank you! Oh, you are good, you are kind!" And with a nervous, anxious haste, he turned to open the door behind. But Claire Cobb stopped him with a smile.

"Look! I've a little surprise for you here."

And she drew his attention to the monogram on the door of the car.

“What’s this?” he asked, in astonishment.

“Your initials of ownership,” she replied, “to help you in your fairy tale.”

Tears started abruptly in his eyes. Without a word, he wrung her hand again and got into the car; and a half hour later, they arrived at the Pennsylvania Station.

“Now, when my father comes,” he said, “we go by Seventh Avenue—pleass? And then up to Riverside Drive—and on a Hundred and Sixth Street, we turn and come to the hospital on the Park. You will drive him very careful—yes? And slowly—pleass? You give me time?” In a low voice, Claire Cobb replied:

“We’ll be very careful of him, my dear, and we’ll give you plenty of time.”

“And you won’t mind what I say to you—if I treat you as servants?” Benny implored.

“No, no, say anything you like. I promise you I’ll act the part.”

And a few minutes later, standing at the door of the car, the whole demeanor of Claire Cobb



became respectful and demure. Slowly out of the station came Benjamin Gluck and his young wife, a dark, slender woman dressed in brown, who had brought his father in from the country. Between them, in a long wheel chair used for transporting invalids, lay a little old skeleton of a man, with thin, hollow, feverish cheeks. His small black eyes were bright and fixed with a hungry affection on his son, and he clung tight to Benny's hand. As they came out, he looked around, with a feeble roll of his head.

"*Ach*, Benny boy, vere ees it? Vere's de ambulance?" he asked. Benjamin bent over him.

"We don't need any ambulance," he replied. "We got a surprise for you, *Tatileib*"—which means "dear little father." And with a smile, he pointed to the Car of Croesus standing there. "Look at the car we got!" he said.

The old invalid looked, then started forward, eyes popping nearly out of his head, at all that rich magnificence.

"Vot you mean, you gotta car?"



“I mean I got it! See for yourself! Ain’t it fine? Ain’t it expensive, Papa?”

Rising still farther in the chair, the bony hands of the little old man reached out and seized those of his son, while his look, in sharp, desperate appeal, searched the two eyes smiling down.

“Benny! You mean we got a success? We got a success in our business, son?”

Jocosely Benny wagged his head.

“*Ach!* Don’t you worry. Ask no questions. Wait till you see our new office already—the show rooms—all the stylish models! Wait till you see our new apartment!”

“Apartment—apartment——”

“On Riverside Drive. All the modern improvements, *Tatileib*—every inch of it positively de luxe! And we got a fine big room for you, as soon as you come from the hospital home. *Tatileib’s* Room, the kids call it already.”

“Frieda! Vy didn’t you tell me?” he cried. The dark, slender young woman smiled tenderly down.

“Now, now, Papa dear, no excitement,” she said. “Benny begged me to let him tell it himself. He has such a big surprise for you, and he’ll tell it all, while you’re going up town. I’ll run up ahead to the hospital and see that your room is ready there.”

“But, Frieda—no! Mit us you must come!”

“Oh, you won’t need me, Papa dear. Benny wants you all to himself. And if he needs any help at all, Jenny, my maid, will be right in the car.”

“A maid you got?” the old man gasped; but with a quick kiss, his daughter was gone. “Oy, oy, oy—such expenses, my son!”

But Benny had now turned away, and his manner grew suddenly stern and impatient.

“Heigh, Jenny! What’s the matter?” he cried. “Do I pay you eighty dollars a month that you should stand like a dumb bell here? Come on now—help me!”

“Yes, sir.”

Respectfully the trim young maid came forward, and with tender care assisted her employer to lift the excited old merchant out of

the chair and into the car. As they did so, Benjamin pointed proudly to the initials on the door.

“Can you see it, Papa, my monogram? B.G. That stands for Benjamin Gluck. Will you believe me now already?”

“Oy, oy—such expenses—such expenses!” gasped the little invalid, as he sank limply down inside.

“Shall I come in, too, sir?” asked Claire Cobb. Benny turned on her an indignant stare.

“With us, you mean? You will sit in the car like a lady?” he cried. “Have I not told you your place is in front—with the chauffeur?” And as the big car started off, he said to his father, in a low tone: “Would you believe it? We got a Goy prince for a chauffeur! A busted Russian!” He chuckled with glee. “Tell him to drive slow, Jenny dear. I want Papa should see our fine new office, only a few blocks from here.”

Then he turned back to the little old merchant, gathered him tenderly into his arms and began to make him comfortable, with the

pillows that Frieda had brought from the train.

“Now, now—no more excitements,” he begged.

“Excitements—how can I hellup excitements? Apartments, apartments—automobiles—shofers und maids—und I get no excitements? Vy don’t you talk business? Vot ees it, vot ees it? Tell me the truth, so hellup you *Gott!*”

A fond, steady smile was the son’s reply.

“You want I should tell what has happened in business, these last two years while you were so sick?”

“*Ach*, yes, be quick!”

“Now, now, keep quiet, *Tatileib*—remember what the doctor said. Soon I will tell you all you ask. But don’t you worry—don’t you hurry. Right away I am going to show you our new office,” Benjamin said, “so that you can see for yourself.”

They were in the new garment center now, just north of the great terminal; and Benjamin pointed out of the window to a vast new skyscraper, resplendent in the deepening dusk with

a thousand sparkling lights. "Up on the twenty-second floor is our new office and show rooms," he said. "Our business lately grows so fast that soon already we shall need two whole floors instead of one!"

His father took one dazzled look and then turned wildly back to him.

"*Ach*, Benny, explain it! Give me the facts! Say it in Yiddish!" the old man cried.

The car moved slowly on up town, through the dense late afternoon traffic of Seventh Avenue. In front, the maid and the huge chauffeur, by the aid of the long narrow mirror before them, could see the two faces close behind, one smiling into the other's eyes—eyes incredulous still at first, and even sharply suspicious at times; but later growing spellbound, as their owner began to believe the fairy tale that was being told. Told in a guttural foreign tongue. The Prince could make nothing of it at all; but Claire Cobb, in ten years of business life, had picked up some Yiddish; and listening intently now, her clever eyes began to shine.

"Oh, what a wonderful story!" she breathed.

“He has thought it all out so carefully! He’s ready for Father on every detail!”

“But does the old man believe it all?” inquired the Prince, in a low tone.

“He’s beginning to,” she smiled. “The poor old lamb, he never did have a keen business head—and now he’s so feeble and sick and old that his mind is far from clear. And he *wants* to believe—he *wants* to so!”

Sharp questions from the father came, but promptly the son answered them, with names of firms and dates and figures. More and more radiant grew the face of the little invalid back there. Tears glistening in the eyes of both, and holding tight each other’s hands, rapidly they talked on and on.

“Now they are going over the whole long story of twenty years, since Father came from Galicia,” whispered Claire Cobb to her friend.

Both were talking at once, and into their talk broke strange, quick laughs and ejaculations. The twilight deepened. The big car sped smoothly up through Central Park and turned over to Riverside Drive, with its long array of

apartment buildings twinkling, glamorous in the dusk. But Benjamin Gluck had forgotten his plan to point one of them out as their new home. He was too intensely absorbed with his father in memories of years gone by. The tears were still bright in the old man's eyes, as they looked back on that long, hard road, that dark valley of despair, from this dazzling mountain peak of success, to which he had been so suddenly raised by the story he had heard from his son.

"*Ach*, Benny, Benny, how happy you make me! I am so happy I wish I could live!"

"Live? What you mean, live? You ain't go'n' to die!"

"Vy should I go to the hospital then, mit doctors und professors there to make on me big operations?"

"Now don't you worry, *Tatileib*," said Benny, in a cheerful tone. "They got an operation planned to make you fine and healthy soon!"

"*Ach*, no, my boy, I can't belief it."

"You want I should tell you what he says—



the professor in the hospital? He says your trouble comes from worries, too much worries all your life! And Papa—listen!” Both his hands were holding his little father’s tight; and looking into the old man’s eyes, he declared impressively: “Your worries are all over now! All you got is some bad days until the operation cures you! Then right away we bring you home—and you shall be happy all your life!”

The lips of the invalid quivered with joy.

“Oh, Benny, vy didn’t you tell me before—vy didn’t you tell of the business, son?”

“Did I not tell you many times—‘Don’t worry. Business ain’t so bad?’ ”

“Yes, yes, you said it ain’t so *bad*! Vy didn’t you say how *good* it vas?”

“Because most of the time you were so sick you couldn’t tell a skirt from a jacket. ‘Don’t talk to him business,’ the doctor said. And even when you were not so bad, you would not have believed me, *Tatleib*. We said, ‘Wait till he can see for himself.’ And besides, all this success we got, I could never be sure of it till now. How could I tell you till I was sure?”



“Und you’re sure of it now—positively, Ben?”

Once more the old merchant had raised himself up and had fixed again that searching look squarely on the eyes of his son. Unflinchingly Ben met his gaze.

“Positively! Absolutely!”

“You tell me no lies, so hellup you *Gott?*”

“Am I telling you lies? Have you eyes in your head? Can you look at this car and see that we got it—see my initials on the door? Can you see what a stylish maid we got—and a big Goy prince for a chauffeur? Can’t you see it? Ain’t it all a fact?”

Feebly the old man rolled his head.

“*Ach, Gott*, such expenses—such expenses!”

But the son only laughed at that.

“I should worry!” he exclaimed. “Just wait till you come with me down to the office—and see our new show room and stylish models! Wait till I give you a look at our books—and show you the figures! Oy, oy—money talks!”

“*Benny!*” From the hour just passed, the little old merchant looked quite exhausted. The

two bright spots of red in his cheeks had vanished, his face went rapidly gray. But with eyes bright, keen and searching still, he made a last effort: "*Yes, money talks! Give me the figures! The profits last month!*" Sternly he gripped the hands of his son, whose answer came back like a flash.

"One t'ousand eight hundert an' forty-two dollars an' seventy cents! And that's a fact!"

"Last year?"

"Last year our profits come just under twenty-t'ree t'ousand—net!"

"So hellup you *Gott?*"

"So help me God!"

Then in the mirror, the two in front saw the little old merchant throw up both hands, in a radiant gesture of gratitude.

"*Raboinu shel olom! A dank dir!*" he cried. A strange little sob burst from his lips; he pitched limply into the arms of his son. Benjamin bent over him then and began to murmur endearments fiercely in that foreign tongue. Quickly the big Car of Croesus, rushing through a dark side street, came to a huge hospital over

on the edge of the Park. A waiting attendant opened a gate, they entered a courtyard, and there at the door stood Benny's wife. Her dark, thin face was wreathed in smiles; but at sight of the motionless form inside, sharply she opened the door and asked:

"Has he fainted, Benny?"

"Yes, thank God! And Frieda—quick—pleass—make 'em hurry! I can't stand it any more!"

"Yes, Benny dear—we will, we will!"

And when two men with a stretcher had taken his father out of his sight, he huddled suddenly back, far back, into a corner of the car, his small, thin shoulders shaking hard, looking beaten and old and wracked by his grief.

"Oh, *Tatileib*, die soon!" he begged. "Don't make me tell you any more lies!"

And Benjamin's prayer was granted that night. For the spark of life had been blown out by that sudden burst of excitement and joy. The fairy tale was ended.

## CHAPTER VIII

ONLY a few days after this, on a crisp November morning, Claire Cobb decided to give herself a little relaxation and at the same time keep in touch with the business in which she had once been engaged. So, changing from her costume of maid into a smart new street suit, she dropped in at Bendel's, to see the late fall models. She had asked the Prince to meet her there. He arrived with the car a bit before noon; and a few minutes later, she came out with a new friend, a dark little woman plainly dressed in a cheap old suit, anxious looking and worn to the bone, but with bright, indomitable eyes. Framed in the imposing entrance of that great establishment, Claire's friend made an incongruous sight; and as they came toward the Prince, he threw an inquisitive glance at her.

"She is fighting for something. What is it?" he asked.

As the two women got into the car, Claire asked him to take them at once over to Jersey City; and on the way they talked intently, chuckling from time to time; but he could make nothing of it all, till at last, across the river, they came to a shabby old office building and the small stranger went inside. And then his partner announced:

“Well, my dear, tomorrow this car is to elect a governor!”

“Yes?” The Prince looked calmly intrigued. “I know nothing of your politics in America, dear lady, but I suppose it shall be as you say. Of which one of your provinces shall this governor fellow be?”

“Of the province of New Jersey,” she said. “Jim Reardon is the gentleman’s name and that little woman is Sally, his wife. I met her at Bendel’s, all by herself, and her bright, clever, anxious face caught my attention right away. She knew little or nothing about clothes, so I tried to help a bit; we grew very friendly soon, and it ended in her confiding what it is she has in mind. Her husband is running for gov-

ernor over here in New Jersey. He has very little money to spend, while the other side has oodles of wealth and everything seems to be going their way. But the other candidate's wife, a lady of the Smart Set type, has begun campaigning for her husband; and to show how democratic she is, she's going about in old clothes, in a Ford. That gave Sally Reardon her big idea—for she has been in politics ever since her suffrage days. So she crossed the river to get some clothes; and she was simply delighted, when she heard about this car. She has hired it from tomorrow at dawn!" The Prince was more puzzled than before.

"But what will such a plain little woman want with a car like this?" he asked.

"Tomorrow you will see for yourself," answered his partner, with a smile. "It will be a little lesson in American democracy."

Meanwhile, in the building, Sally Reardon had gone up to the headquarters of her husband's campaign. There she found the outer rooms a scene of confusion and desperate haste. At tables and desks, amid stacks and piles of

circulars and envelopes, typewriters clicked and telephones rang. She went quickly through to an inner room, and stopped for a moment, watching her husband, who sat writing in his shirt sleeves, scowling over a cigar. He was a stocky little man, round-headed, with a fighting face and shrewd, very human, likable eyes. But they had a desperate gleam in them.

"What are you doing, Jim?" she asked.

"Writing my speech for tomorrow night."

"Anything happened since I left?"

"Nothing but a few talks with the boys—and they all sing the same old song. We've got to carry Mercer County." He settled his teeth in his cigar.

"That's where Mrs. Anthony Miles is speaking tomorrow," Sally said, with a gleam of anticipation. Her husband plunged back into his work. "Jimmy," she added, "I've got a plan to swing that county."

He looked quickly up at her.

"What?"

"I can't explain it now," she answered. "But"—she paused an instant—"I'll have to



ask you, I'm afraid, to give me back my Liberty Bonds."

He shot another look at her. Campaign funds were very low. But he opened a drawer and took out the bonds.

"All right, old girl—they're yours," he said. Her lips quivered a bit.

"You can trust me, Jim."

"I know I can."

She bent and kissed him suddenly.

"I won't be home tonight," she said.

Then she came out and got into the car. And had her husband been able to follow her back across the river, he might have thought the long strain of work had driven his small wife insane. For, with her clever companion, who now took her firmly in hand, she went first to Bendel's, and from there to an equally smart shop for shoes and another for hats, and finally to a coiffeur. Into the frivolous fashion mill the little woman valiantly plunged—and emerged at last in a small fur coat and smart street suit and Paris hat, with sleek coiffure and fresh white gloves and a little vanity bag!



At the coiffeur's, she looked in a mirror and anxiously chuckled, at sight of herself.

"If Jim could see me now," she said, "he'd have me psycho-analyzed! Now take me back to your hotel. I'm simply dead for sleep, my dear, and I'd advise you to get some, too, for we've got to start at five A.M. How much am I going to owe you for this? I'd like to settle in advance."

Claire Cobb did some quick figuring. The charge for the Car of Croesus depended on the customer, and this little woman and her fight for her husband made a strong appeal. She had only the five hundred dollars she had got by the sale of her bonds; and even though Claire had persuaded Bendel's to loan the fur coat for tomorrow and make her a special price for the suit, still Sally had spent nearly all that she had.

"I'll tell you what let's do," said Claire. "We'll make it an election bet. You use the car; and if you win, you can pay me a hundred dollars; but if you lose, it won't cost you a cent."

Sally Reardon smiled at her.

"I'll pay you that hundred all right," she replied; and out of her vanity bag she took a small package of receipted bills, from the shops that they had visited. Tearing off a part of one, she wrote upon it rapidly and then handed it to Claire. "Here's my note," she said. It read: "If my husband is elected, I agree to pay one hundred dollars for use of your car on last day before election—Sally Reardon." After reading it, Claire glanced up, and a flash of understanding seemed to pass between them. "Keep it carefully," Sally said.

Long before dawn on the following day, they started out from Claire's hotel. And the enormous prince-chauffeur was completely puzzled still, for the little woman behind was chic as on the night before, while Claire was dressed as a lady's maid.

"And with this," he thought, "they expect to please the hoi polloi of America!"

The city streets were empty now, except for a few night laborers and a milk truck here and there. Quickly he reached the river and crossed. At sixty miles an hour, he sped out through

sleeping towns into the open country, past the lonely, twinkling lights of the slowly awakening farms; and just before dawn, he drew up by the gateway to an immense old country estate, the home of the rival candidate. Inviting him back into the car, the two women produced a thermos bottle of coffee and some sandwiches; and while they breakfasted, Sally's eyes kept turning to the great house of her rival, dimly to be seen through the trees. With a little chuckle, she said:

"I'd like to have been here the other night. She took her first plunge into politics by giving a party for the wives of the farmers and tradespeople here. They'd never been invited before, so they were all dying to see the house and to meet on intimate terms the noted Mrs. Anthony Miles, of whom they had so often read in the society columns. So they arrived in their best clothes, all ready for a grand, big party. But they found her dressed as though for camp. She welcomed them in the library; and seating herself upon the floor, in a hearty democratic tone, she announced:

" 'Now, folks, we're going to have a good old-

fashioned simple time and talk about politics tonight!’

“She had to do most of the talking herself, for they made only glum replies! But not to be discouraged, she has been campaigning since, in her oldest and plainest suit of clothes, in her second assistant gardener’s Ford! She thinks it’s what the people want! . . . Hello! She’s up and stirring now!”

Lights had appeared in some of the windows. A few minutes later, from the long low garage near the gate, an old flivver came out and went up to the house; and returning soon with the lady inside, it passed through the gateway and went rattling down the road.

“There she goes, to talk to the people! Now let’s trail her!” Sally said.

## CHAPTER IX

ABOUT half past seven o'clock, they came to a town, where Mrs. Miles was already speaking from her Ford to quite a crowd of people who worked in the factory close by. She was a young blonde, expensively bobbed, and good looking in spite of her dowdy old clothes, with a smart but very self-satisfied face. She was saying, with a friendly smile:

“We’re fighting for economy, folks, and the good old-fashioned simple ways so dear to every true member of our great democracy. Old-fashioned, I say, because we all know how habits of extravagance have swept over the country of late. The newspapers and magazines are filled with advertisements urging you all to spend your last cent—and that’s what our opponents are preaching, too, in this campaign. While they blind you with cheap promises, they’ll tax your homes and waste your money on fat jobs for their satellites—that is, they

will, if you put them in! And so I say it is up to you! For tomorrow will decide! Which is it to be—political graft, ostentation and waste, or simplicity and economy?”

From the crowd came perfunctory applause.

“Not very enthusiastic about her, are they?” Sally Reardon said. “Now move in and give me a chance.”

So, as the flivver started off, the gleaming, immaculate Car of Croesus moved softly into the midst of the crowd. She leaned graciously out of the window and said:

“Don’t go just yet, friends. Listen to me.”

And they stopped, with a quick curiosity for this chic little stranger in her big, luxurious car.

“You see, I’m Jim Reardon’s wife,” she explained. “And I’ve listened with great interest to what the lady had to say. For in my opinion, the wonderful prosperity of our country in these last few years has come from that same advertising which the lady has attacked—for it has raised our standards of living and made business prosperous. We want good things. We want good clothes—good cars to

ride in, better roads—and for our children, better schools. When she spoke of our extravagance, she forgot to tell you, friends, what we want that money for! My husband is fighting this campaign for better roads and better schools—and I can talk better than she can of that, for I was once one of the satellites to whom she has just referred!

“I had to earn my living, those days; and I taught school not far from here, in a little country schoolhouse; and if the job I had was fat, I had no time to notice it! From early on cold winter days, when I had to get there long before school and coax a fire in the old stove, until the end of the afternoon, when I walked back three miles to town with a bag of night work in my hand, I led a life that Mrs. Miles never even dreamed of, friends, for she was a rich young *débutante* then, going to parties in New York.

“But hard as it was, I loved that job. I was thrilled by the number of boys and girls who, like me, had set their minds upon getting up in the world. ‘Some day we’ll ride in a car like



that,' we thought, as we watched the cars go by. When we sang *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*, we loved it because we believed it was free—because it was built on the big idea that every boy and girl in the land be given a free and equal chance to develop the best stuff that is in him, and so to get up in life, if he can! And that, as you mothers and fathers know, means better schools than we have today!

“Better schools and better roads—for I see that quite a lot of you have parked your motors down the street. You have come in them to your work, and some of you have bumped and splashed over little country roads that I hate to think about! I'll never forget the ride I had, when I was a school teacher here. Early on one rainy night, I got a telephone call from a drugstore, in a town ten miles away. The clerk said that one of our mothers had come to get eye drops for her child, and after she'd gone he had found that he'd given her Prussic acid by mistake! She hadn't any telephone and she lived 'way out on a little farm! I grabbed a Ford from a girl I knew and started for that



lonely farmhouse! It was a rocky road! We flew! We got there just in time, thank God, to keep that child from going stone blind! But we broke two springs in the Ford! Now, friends, it's those little country roads that we want to get in better shape! And if you agree with us in that, vote tomorrow for Jim Rear-don—and better roads and better schools!”

A loud burst of applause was their reply, and the cheering kept on, as the car started off.

“Now her husband's henchmen here,” said Sally, as she leaned back in her seat, “will telephone her at the next stop. I wonder what the lady will do?”

As they came into the next small town, they saw the Ford departing; and two newspaper men came hurrying up, as though scenting a big story. At a glance, they took in the Car of Croesus and Sally's costly furs and hat. Brightly she smiled out at them, for Sally had many newspaper friends.

“What did she say about me?” she asked the younger one of the pair. He was a dark, slim youngster, with a gay relish in his eyes.

“She said an earful, Mrs. Reardon! You’re on the front page tonight! She began about economy and the simple life, her usual line—but then somebody passed her a note; and when she had read it, she announced that you would soon be on the spot, to show the folks just what she meant by showy extravagance and graft!”

“Oh, she said that, did she? Well, I’m sorry!” Sally replied, with a sparkle of pure delight. “For it’s so much safer, if one can, to keep personalities out of campaigns!”

“Oh, please let’s have personalities,” begged the youngster, with a smile.

“No,” said Sally, “not just yet. I was once a school teacher, boys, and I know my American history. I’m going to save my fire till I can see the whites of her eyes! In the meantime, I propose to stick to the issues of this campaign!”

And all that morning, at every stop, ignoring the inquisitive looks directed at her sumptuous car, expensive furs and chic little hat, her lady’s maid and her chauffeur in his livery of rich maroon—she continued to speak about roads

and schools, going into details that bored the Prince and which he could not understand. And yet he was interested still in the situation developing here; for he had been all his life a sensitive, keen observer; and watching now the listening crowds in small towns and villages, as Sally developed her idea of America as a country where ambitious boys and girls thought: "Some day I'll ride in a car like that"—and then made their dreams come true—he grew more and more aware of two quite different kinds of looks, the curious and admiring, the hostile and derisive, that showed in these people's eyes.

Both kinds grew quickly more intense, for news of Sally Reardon was eagerly and rapidly spread by her opponents far ahead. They had paid henchmen in each place; and with a loud, derisive scorn, they began to break into her speeches, to ask about her car and her clothes. But Sally ignored them or put them off. Only once that morning did she have a word to say about clothes. Toward noon, consulting her list of stops, she found she was to speak to the

girls from a silk hosiery mill ahead. Calling Claire Cobb to the back seat, she fervently pumped her about Paris styles; and when they reached the factory, which had closed for the noon hour and from which Mrs. Anthony Miles had just taken her departure, Sally leaned out and beamed on the girls and let them get the full effect of her entire outfit.

“Well, girls,” she said; “I guess you’re about as sick of politics as I am. I’ve been talking it since dawn—and so has Mrs. Anthony Miles, preaching an economy and good old-fashioned simple life that would close this silk stocking mill and lose every one of you your jobs—and would put out of business, too, about half the merchants in this State! For she seems to want the American people to spend their whole lives in last year’s clothes! But unless I’m much mistaken, you’re getting sick of talk like that—and I know that you’re all dying to hear what’s being worn in Paris this year. I dropped in at Bendel’s the other day, where the new fall models have arrived. And I’m going to talk about that for a while.”

Prompted in whispers by Claire Cobb, she kept smiling out at the eager girls and going into minute details that held them more and more enthralled. In fact, the tension rose so high, that when at the end she gayly cried: "And so, my fellow Americans, I hope that you'll vote right tomorrow and let me be your governor's wife!"—the applause burst like a bomb!

News of this little speech, however, was promptly telephoned ahead and was eagerly seized by the other side as only one more striking proof of her frivolous extravagance. Mrs. Miles, in her Ford, in her old suit of clothes, kept alluding to it with venomous scorn. The crowds increased and so did the jibes and jeers of her henchmen. Sally kept patient with them still.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "that Mrs. Miles has resorted to personalities. I don't see what all this has to do with better roads and better schools."

"It has a hell of a lot to do with this whole election!" somebody roared. "Where did Jim

Reardon get the cash to pay for that car and them swell clothes?" Sally faced him calmly, with an ominous glint in her eye.

"To that question at this moment," she answered, "I have nothing whatever to say."

But the pressure to explain was now suddenly brought to bear from a quite unexpected source. Far out in the country, she had stopped at the little schoolhouse where she had taught in former days, and with several friendly newspaper men and a group of admiring children and mothers, Sally had inspected the schoolhouse, and was just starting to say a few words, when a dusty old car dashed up and stopped, and out of it jumped her husband! At sight of him, she paused abruptly, for his face was very grim!

"That will be about all!" he snapped. And to the Prince—"Drive on!" he said. He jumped into the car and off they went, and to Claire Cobb and the chauffeur came this explosive utterance:

"Hell's delight!"

"Don't you swear at me, Jim!"

"Have you gone clean out of your head, run-

ning 'round in a car like this? If I was the damnedest grafter on earth, you couldn't have better dressed the part! All morning they've been busting up every speech I tried to make, by asking where in hell my wife got her Rolls Royce and her Paris clothes?"

Sally flashed a little smile.

"What did you say to 'em, Jimmy dear?"

"Say to 'em? I told 'em they lied! For I couldn't believe it! I couldn't believe you'd come into my shop and grab my last five hundred dollars, on the most critical day of my life—just so that you could doll all up like Texas Guinan!" Jimmy cried.

"It wasn't your money, dear, it was mine. I got it by selling my Liberty Bonds."

"S'pose you did? Ain't you my wife? Why bust up my whole campaign?" Poor Jimmy broke off, with a sharp groan. "Well," he said, "it's ended now! I'm licked and you're crazy! Enough said! I'll take you to an asylum tomorrow and have 'em X-ray the inside of your head!"

"Not tomorrow, dear," she replied. "To-



morrow is Election Day.” And as he glared at her, her hand closed firmly on her husband’s arm. “Look at me, Jim—straight at me. I’m smiling at you,” Sally said. And her smile was so steady and so sane that it kept him mute while she went on:

“Just think a minute—of the time when we first met each other, dear. I was a suffrage leader then. Remember the way you fought us, Jim, and the way we brought you men to your knees? I was some little politician, you said. I still think I am today, for I’ve never forgotten what I learned about women in politics. And don’t forget that they will cast nearly half the votes tomorrow,” she said. “And I may be wrong, but I think I know how the average woman wants the wife of the governor to be dressed—and how most mothers still believe in America as a place where their kids may have a chance to ride in a car like this, some day. I think I’m getting votes for you; I think I’m going to carry this county. If you don’t believe me, wait until you hear my speech in Trenton tonight!”



She smiled at him still and he stared back:

“Now what in——”

“Trust me! Trust me, Jim!”

“All right—there’s nothing else to be done,” he answered, in a dismal tone.

They stopped and his old car came up; he got into it and disappeared in a cloud of dust on the road ahead. And Sally Reardon, left alone, seemed for a moment to be afraid; for her face looked suddenly worn and rigid with anxiety. But only for a moment. With a determined effort, she braced herself; and her low, clear voice came out to the pair in front of her.

“Yes,” she said, “I know I’m right!”

## CHAPTER X

BUT all afternoon the strain increased. In factory towns and villages, the story of this running fight between the two women grew apace. So did the crowds; and in outbursts of jeering and storms of applause, the Pros and the Antis voiced their feelings toward the handsomely dressed little woman speaking from her gorgeous car. Her face grew haggard and strained again; and by nightfall, Claire Cobb could stand it no longer. She stopped the car by a roadhouse and said:

“Come in and have some tea, my dear.”

“Yes,” said Sally, “I think I will.”

So they went in, to rest a while. But they’d only been there for a minute or two, when they were joined by three reporters—among them the slim youngster who had kept all day on her trail.

“Mrs. Reardon,” he said earnestly, “you’ve

simply got to answer this talk about your car and your Paris clothes! They've put the story on the air and are broadcasting it all over the State!"

"I'll answer, all right," was Sally's reply. "But as I told you this morning, young man, I'll wait till I see the whites of her eyes! How far are we from Trenton now?"

"About twenty miles or so."

"Thank goodness!" Mrs. Reardon sighed. "I'll make no speeches on the way. I feel I need a little rest."

"Afraid you won't rest much," he said. "There's a rotten piece of road ahead."

For a moment, she did not seem to hear him. Then she gave a little start.

"The road is bad, you say?"

"It's awful!"

"Oh, poor Mrs. Miles, in that bumpy old Ford!" said Sally, in a compassionate tone. "Have you ever ridden in a Ford—one about eight years old, I mean?"

"I have," the young reporter said.

"Ever run one?"

“Half my life!” As he spoke, he looked at her in a surprised, inquisitive way; but Sally did not bat an eye.

“Then you know how uncomfortable she has been. Poor thing, I don’t blame her for all the nasty things she has said about me today. I only wish I could ease her pain. I’ll keep right behind her, on this last ride; and if on that bad piece of road, her poor old flivver by any chance should happen to break down a bit, I’ll insist on her coming into my car and I’ll take her to the mass meeting tonight.”

With a queer, joyous little snort, the young man who knew all about Fords rose quickly and hurried out to his car. A few minutes later, he found Mrs. Miles having tea at a roadhouse ahead, while her poor, weary flivver sat all alone in the darkness outside. For a time, he was very busy there. Then the lady came out with her gardener-chauffeur and they started on again in the night. Soon the Car of Croesus came up. He stopped it a moment and looked in.

“Mrs. Reardon,” he said, in a low, solemn

voice, "I'd keep close behind her, if I were you!"

"Thank you so much!" exclaimed Sally. "I will!"

The sandy, crooked country road wound off through the farms and up over a hill and then led down into some woods. And there in the dark, they soon made out the red tail light of the Ford. It was going slowly and lamely, flopping a bit from side to side. Quickly they caught up to it and blew their horn until it stopped. Then Sally got out and came graciously smiling up to the car of her opponent.

"Is this Mrs. Anthony Miles?" she asked.

"It is."

"I'm Mrs. Reardon! And I'm so glad we found you here! I heard that you had taken this road, and I was afraid you'd lose your way and not be on time for the meeting tonight."

"That's very kind of you, I'm sure," was the lady's frigid reply. "But I haven't lost my way at all and I'll be at the meeting, if I can. My car seems to be a bit out of order."

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" Sally exclaimed. And

to the three newspaper men, who now came eagerly up to the pair, she added, in a cheerful tone: "Well, here she is, gentlemen, just as we feared. It seems her car is breaking down. You do want to speak at the meeting, don't you?" she asked, turning back to Mrs. Miles.

"Of course I do!"

"Then come with me!"

Mrs. Miles made a choking little sound, that seemed like a cry of rage. But the slim young man, who knew all about Fords, said to her very earnestly:

"Come on, Mrs. Miles. Why take a chance on not getting to that meeting in time? You've got only forty minutes to make it!"

"We'll easily do it in my Rolls Royce," urged Sally, with hospitable warmth, "and I'd simply love to have you! Do come, Mrs. Miles! If you refuse, what can I tell them at Trenton tonight?"

"Very well—thank you!" snapped Mrs. Miles.

And a few moments later, by Sally's side, she was rolling on toward town. At first, she

seemed to be greatly chagrined, as though she had counted on arriving at the big meeting in the car in which she had proved her democracy. Instead of that, she was getting a lift from the selfsame woman and car that she had so fiercely attacked all day. But her success had been so great, and she felt so sure of herself, that gradually her mood changed to one of complacent pity toward this woman of the lower classes, who had shown such atrocious taste as to flaunt the fruits of her husband's graft in the faces of all the voters. And so, when Sally Reardon said:

"I know you won't care to talk, Mrs. Miles; so I'll leave you alone to a hard-earned rest, and to think of your speech while I think of mine"—she replied, in a malicious tone:

"You'll have a good deal to think of, I'm afraid."

"Oh, I guess I'll manage it," answered Sally cheerfully. "You see, I've been in politics off and on for twenty years, and I know the people pretty well."

"Really?" said Mrs. Anthony Miles.

“But before we start our thinking, let’s have a little beauty sleep. We ought to need it, Heaven knows!”

And leaning back in the large, soft seat, Sally Reardon closed her eyes. Her face could be but dimly seen; but even the clearest light would have shown nothing on her countenance but a look of guileless peace. A half hour passed, and the outlying lights of the town broke in on their rest.

“Oh,” said Sally, with a start, “we’re almost in Trenton now! Would you care to use my vanity bag?”

“No, thank you!”

“I’m sorry. I think I will.”

With lipstick and powder, the little woman quickly began to freshen up; and to all appearances, she felt perfectly easy still. On nearing the center of the town, they found immense crowds waiting there; and as the long, gleaming Car of Croesus was recognized on the edge of the throng, the jeers and jibes began again and soon swelled into a menacing roar! But Sally did not seem to hear. Cheerful and fresh, in her costly furs and becoming little hat, she got



out with her companion; and after a word or two with her maid, in the midst of a squad of police, she made her way to the torch-lighted platform. Both the husbands were sitting up there; and as their two wives appeared, Sally's husband looked haggard and grim, while Mr. Miles looked pleased and proud. So did his wife. When introduced to the waiting crowd, she advanced to the front and, in ringing tones of triumph, gave her speech on economy and the good old-fashioned life.

“We have charged that the opposing party,” she declared, toward the end, “stand for just the opposite! And our charge has been well supported by the amazing spectacle of the other candidate's wife, a woman of no personal wealth, who was a poor country school teacher only a few years ago, touring the State in a Rolls Royce car, in costly furs and Paris clothes! Possibly she will explain to you how her husband paid for all that! But if she fails to convince you, friends, I hope you people will give your votes for Governor to Anthony Miles!”

In a roar of applause from her party, Mrs.

Miles went back past her rival to the rear of the platform, smiling and complacent still. But Sally, in the meantime, had risen and come to the front of the stage; and as the tumult rapidly changed to a hostile roar and then died down, she faced all those inquisitive stares with a smile of perfect friendliness.

“I’m glad to be with you tonight,” she said, “and glad that my day is nearly done. It began for me at five o’clock, when I went to the palatial home of our honorable opponent and saw his good lady start out for the day, in her second assistant gardener’s Ford. And I’ve followed her steadily since that time. She has told the people how we mean to waste their money, and I’ve replied by telling how we want it for better roads and schools. And we’ve bumped together over such roads as I hate to think about. One was so bad that, an hour ago, her poor little flivver gave up the ghost. So I brought her here along with me—and here she has just told you that I am Exhibit A of our party’s showy extravagance.

“I cheerfully admit the charge. For though,

in the kind of life I lead, I've had no time for clothes like this—nor have I had the money, friends—I am not like Mrs. Miles. This is no day for a Ford for me, it's my one grand party of all the year! So I swore that I'd dress up for it, if it left me a pauper from now till next fall! I'm all dressed up and I'm glad that I am—but if you like the way I'm dressed, I hope you won't hold it against Mrs. Miles that she came before you in dowdy old clothes. For it's not that she's a woman of bad taste, as you might think. No, she has the most exquisite taste, and for years she has been one of the best dressed women in New York. So, if she wore a cheap old suit and came rattling to you in a Ford, she did it out of the good of her heart. She thought it would make you more comfortable. I mean, she was trying to look like you and be democratic—one of the people. I don't have to bother with that myself, for I was a country school teacher once, and so I've been brought up that way. I'm one of you! I'm Jim Reardon's wife! I'm a woman in a limousine! She's a lady in a Ford!"

A sudden burst of glee broke out from Sally's supporters at this last line; but the hired hecklers and boosters of the other side were not to be so easily downed, and hoarse and loud they roared their questions as to where she got her car. Raising both her small, gloved hands, Sally stood smiling and waiting, until the hostile tumult died.

"Now don't get excited—and give me a chance," she continued pleasantly. "For I ask you, friends, what could I do? I had to have something to ride in today—and I couldn't take my gardener's car—because I have no gardener! So I got this motor you've seen tonight—for it seems to me, when you go to the people to ask for their votes, in this big prosperous country of ours, it's more fitting to go in a fine big car, even if you have to hire it! So I hired this one from a friend!"

"Prove it! Show us!" the hecklers roared.

"I will—I will," she answered. "I haven't been in politics off and on for twenty years without knowing you've got to give an account of election expenses in each campaign. Here

is mine.” And she held up a small package of papers in her hand. “To begin with, here’s Exhibit One. It’s a record from my bank of the sale of five Liberty Bonds, the money I’d saved as a school teacher and which I invested in the war. Exhibit Two—my bill from Bendel’s for this suit. They charged me nothing for the fur coat; they generously offered to loan it to me for today. Exhibits Three and Four and Five—bills for my hat and shoes and stockings. Exhibit Six—bill of coiffeur. Exhibit Seven—bill for hotel, where I spent last night, so my husband wouldn’t see my new clothes!” She handed all the slips of paper down to the eager newspaper men. “Look them over, boys,” she said. And then, quickly stopping the cheers of her friends with uplifted hands, she finished her speech:

“That left me a hundred for the car! And I couldn’t buy even a flivver for that—but luckily I met a friend who showed such generous interest in the fight I’ve made today, that she offered me her limousine! And as proof of her ownership, I offer you Exhibit Eight—her

owner's license!" Sally said. "This generous friend insisted on coming along today as my maid, and she wanted all this to be quite free. But I couldn't let her do it that way; so in place of cash payment, I gave her my note, agreeing to pay her a hundred dollars for the use of her car today, in case my husband is elected! Otherwise I don't pay a cent! But I hope that I'm going to have to pay! I hope the free people of this great State, who have heard Mrs. Miles and me today, will show by their votes tomorrow that they feel as I do about American democracy—and that they agree with the ideas of the woman in the limousine and not of the lady in the Ford!"

In the deafening roar of cheers that ensued, she turned back to her husband, with a smile. And the little man embraced her.

"Sally, old girl, thank God for you! Thank God for you!" he fervently cried.

An hour later, they started back home. Sally's husband came with her, and at first their glad, excited voices were heard. Then she wearily leaned her head upon his shoulder and fell

asleep. So did Claire Cobb, in the front seat. But their chauffeur, the Prince Borissovitch, watched the road, as it wound back through sleeping farms and little towns; and the gleam in his great, ironic black eyes showed his keen relish and delight in this lesson in democracy. Late the next evening, while Claire and he were dancing at the *Club Russe* in New York, a check for a hundred dollars and a brief message came to her.

“You win. Jim elected—Sally,” it said.



## CHAPTER XI

“WHAT a gorgeous snowy Christmas Eve!” said Claire Cobb to the huge chauffeur at her side. The long, rich, gleaming Car of Croesus was waiting near the entrance of the Commodore Hotel. All around, the glamorous lights, from taxis, shops and countless windows in the great buildings overhead, were dimmed and blurred by millions of tiny snowflakes drifting down. All the sounds of the city were muffled, too. New York was mysterious, that night, and hushed and softened and subdued—as though, forgetting its mad, tumultuous chase of the dollar, it had stopped to wonder a while—about the birth of a little boy.

The Prince Ivan Borissovitch was smiling at the snowflakes with a whimsical regret, as if they stirred old memories of a life across the sea. For this prodigious creature had still a streak of sentiment beneath all his irony. So



had his young companion; and now, as she turned and watched the entrance of the big hotel close by, a little frown of annoyance came on her bright, attractive face. Through the door-man at the Commodore, they had secured two customers, who wished to make a splurge this evening; but she was not in the mood for such adventurers tonight.

"I wish we'd never seen this pair!" she exclaimed to her partner. "As soon as we can get rid of them, let's tour around in this gorgeous snow and do a little something in the Christmas spirit tonight!"

A gay chuckle close by her side made her turn quickly, with a start. A lean young man in an old army coat stood there smiling at the car. He was tall, his wide shoulders stooped a bit, his face was tanned by wind and sun, and he had genial, clear blue eyes.

"Why, lady," he drawled, in a soft Southern voice, "I reckon that's a fine idea—jest what I'd admire to do myself."

"Who are you?" demanded Claire Cobb, with a glance at the suit case in his hand.

“Oh, I’m a Texas magnate,” he smiled, “one of these heah young millionaires. I been in this big Yankee town as long as I can stand it, ma’am, an’ I’m goin’ back home to Texas to-night. But the minute I laid eyes on this car, I wanted to ride around in it. I nevah did see such a snow in my life! We don’t often have any down our way. An’ I got a lot of money to spend, so I’d like to be Santy Clause a while, an’ see if we can’t locate some humanity in this town. My train don’t go till one o’clock. So, ma’am, if you can jest arrange to shake that couple you seem to dislike and let me ride around with you, I’ll pay any price you see fit to ask.”

“It isn’t a matter of price,” smiled Claire, attracted at once to this young man. And she briefly explained about the car, and her mood and her predicament. He listened amusedly and replied:

“Oh, then let’s say to hell with ’em, ma’am, if you don’t mind my bein’ a little profane. Jest you leave this in my hands.”

He went to the hotel doorman, a stout and

gloomy little man in a huge military coat; and peeling off a yellow bill from a huge roll which he produced, he quickly arranged that the couple inside be provided with some other car. Then he returned to Claire and announced:

“Well, ma’am, I got it all arranged! Now what will I owe you for tonight?”

“Nothing!” she answered.

“No, that won’t do. I tell you I got all this money to spend an’ I jest can’t see my way to ridin’ ’round in this scrumptious car without I pay your reglah price. Napoleon Bonaparte ovah theah says it’s a hundred dollars for the evenin’, an’ I reckon it’s cheap at that. So heah it is—an’ if you like, you can give it to some poor devil who needs it—for I expect, befo’ we get through, we may round up quite a few right lonely little lambs in this storm, who got left out of Christmas tonight.”

“All right,” she laughed. “Now where shall we go?”

“To the Grand Central,” he replied. “I already got a bunk on that train, but I reckon I bettah pay fo’ it, while I still got plenty of cash.

I been mighty gay in this big town an' I'll want a place to sleep tonight."

The big station was only a block away. He went in and stayed there for some time, and apparently he made a new friend; for when he came out to the car again, he brought with him a lively little brunette. Not at all afraid of strangers, she appeared to be the kind well able to take care of herself. Plainly dressed, her face piquante, with a small and saucy nose and a determined mouth and chin, a look of exasperation and yet of curiosity, too, was to be seen in her bright black eyes, as she hurried along by the Texan's side. With a smile and a wave of his hand, he introduced her to Claire Cobb:

"Heah she is, ma'am, Miss Natalie Brown. We met at the ticket window in theah an' she told me about the trouble she's in. It seems she's one of these poor little lambs who got no place to go tonight."

"I want to go to Arkansas!" the small Westerner exclaimed. "I've been waiting around for hours in there to get a berth on that

one o'clock train! They told me they were thinking of putting on an extra car, but now some outrageous millionaire has had his private car hitched on, and they say in this snow storm they don't dare make their train any more for the engine to haul! So I'm being left—so that old Mr. Croesus can ride back home to his oil fields in style! I'd like to wring his fat old neck!"

"Oh, now, ma'am, please don't feel that way on Christmas Eve," the Texan begged her. "Didn't I promise to help you, Hon? If you'll jest come along, like a good little girl, an' help us to play Santy Claus, I swear to you I'll find some way to get you on that train tonight."

"But how you go'n' to do it?" she asked. Her dark, pretty face was flushed. As he smiled down at her, a flash of mutual interest passed between them; and her curiosity grew even more lively than before.

"I'll do it, Missy, nevah you fear. When I promise a lady, I come through. But what you-all so anxious to go for? Got a husband or somebody waitin' out West?"

"I have not."

"Then you an' me can get on that train without a thing to worry about."

"Who are you," she demanded, "to be splurging 'round in a car like this, like a regular multi-millionaire?"

"But I am one, Honey," he replied. "I'm one of these heah poor little black sheep, whose kind pa has given him so many cattle ranches to play with that he don't know what to do. An' I'm go'n' to get you on that train an' you'll be quite safe in this car tonight. So come on an' let's play Santy Claus, an' fo'get your troubles a while."

The small Westerner still held back; but with her curiosity attracted by this friendly soul, who had at his disposal such a sumptuous car as this, she listened to the reassuring explanation given by Claire, and soon agreed to join the group and ride around for an hour or so. As she got in, the Texan spied another one on whom to bestow his Christmas hospitality. A brisk, sturdy, plain old man in a shabby overcoat, with a slouch hat pulled down over his

square, strong, wrinkled face, had just come out of the station and was having a look at the storm.

“Hello, Uncle—Merry Christmas, suh!” the genial young ranchman said.

“Same to you,” was the reply.

“This heah snow storm seems to please you.”

“It does. I haven’t seen one like it in nigh onto forty years.” But the old stranger then looked up with a sharp, suspicious glance. “What can I do for you?” he asked.

“Play Santa Claus,” the Texan said.

“How’s that?” And his glance grew sharper still. But when he learned of the party the Southerner was giving tonight, into his twinkling, shrewd brown eyes a grim look of relish came, and the sight of the car close by stirred his curiosity.

“All right, I’ll go,” he promptly said. “I was just startin’ out by myself to have a little look at this snow, for it got me thinkin’ of Christmas Eves up in Vermont, when I was a boy. But I ain’t so young as I used to be and the snow looks pretty deep. So I’ll be glad to



ride around with you young folks for a while and see what you're up to here."

"That's fine, Uncle! Get right in—an' we'll see what we can do to give you an old-fashioned Christmas tonight!"

They had hardly left the station, when an affable little chap, who from a short distance had been closely watching the group, came hurrying after them through the snow and smilingly waved for the car to stop. As it did so, he poked an inquisitive face up close to the open window and said:

"Awfully sorry to trouble you, friends, but would you mind telling me which way you're going in this storm?"

"Oh, I reckon we'll go to Broadway first," the Texan said good-naturedly.

"That's my home street!" the little fellow answered, beaming with delight. "Would you mind taking me over that way?"

"Get in," the genial ranchman said.

"Thanks awfully!" He hopped inside, and taking one of the smaller seats, sat fairly purring with content. "What a lovely, fine, big



car!" He turned a blandly inquisitive look on the trio sitting there. "Strangers in New York, I see. Planning a little Christmas party?"

"Yes," the Texan answered, "my good old Uncle Jehosophat heah an' my little cousin, Miss Natalie Brown, are hoping to locate a Christmas tree an' a little humanity in this town."

"Well, well, well—now ain't that fine?" the cheery little stranger said. "Yes, Christmas is some grand old time. All the girls have long silk stockings waiting for old Santy Claus; and with holiday hooch on every side, there's nothing quite like Christmas Eve and no place for it like New York! We like to jazz it up a bit! Take a look at those sparklers just ahead!"

They were nearing Broadway as he spoke; and that great, glamorous region of lights, filling the whole earth and sky, was blurred and softened by the snow into an enchanting fairy dream. Miss Natalie Brown gave a cry of delight, and the little New Yorker looked pleased as Punch.

"I knew you'd love it!" he exclaimed. "That's the big New York idea of jazzing Christmas! How'd you like to see a little night-club life?" he urged on them hospitably. "I gotta friend in a club close by, who would take good care of you!"

"How about it, Hon?" the Texan inquired of Miss Natalie Brown. "Would you let me dance with you, Arkansas?" But the little girl looked up at her tall companion with a smile.

"Why, Texas," she answered, "I'm so small you wouldn't know that I was with you. You'd walk all over me. And besides, it's bound to be hot and stuffy indoors, so let's stay out in this lovely snow and hunt up some real Christmas here."

"All right, Arkansas," he replied. And he spoke to Claire Cobb in the front seat: "Maybe you can take us, ma'am, to a mo' human an' old-fashioned section of this Yankee town." But before she could reply, their self-elected little guide broke eagerly in again and said:

"Well, you people are hard to please—but I know the very place you want!"

And with the good-natured Texan's consent, he gave directions to the chauffeur. But as the car went on down town, Claire Cobb whispered to the Prince:

"I don't like this little lamb—he looks to me more like a rat! I wish they would get rid of him!" The Prince Borissovitch only smiled. A gleam of amused anticipation came into his big black eyes and he said:

"Wait, dear lady. We shall see."

But if he were hoping for any dark excitement on this Christmas Eve, he seemed doomed to disappointment. For they came down through Washington Square into a great labyrinth of narrow, crooked tenement streets, all clean and fresh with snow tonight. And here their self-appointed guide stopped the car and cheerfully said:

"Well, folks, I guess I'll leave you now, for I gotta friend to see down here. But if you people are looking for the real old-fashioned Christmas spirit, this is the place for it tonight!"

And though relieved to be rid of him, they had

to admit that he was right. Crowds of belated Christmas shoppers hurried along with a festive air, or passed in and out of little shops, whose windows were brightly lighted still. Dark-faced people, laughing people, simple people. Signs in Italian met one's eyes on every hand. The car had gone but a short way, when they saw, coming out of a grocery shop, a broadly smiling, stout old man with a great soft shock of snowy hair, whose arms were filled with packages. The visitor from Texas acted as though he had met an old friend.

“Well, well, if it isn't old Tony himself! Come on, San Antonio, step this way! This grand big car,” he gayly called, “was just made to tote those presents around! Come on now, don't let's lose no time!” And as the surprised and delighted old foreigner climbed in with his load, the introductions were quickly made: “San Antonio—Uncle Jehosophat—an' my little friend, Miss Natalie Brown. We-all been lookin' all over this town fo' a chance to play Santy Claus tonight—so tell the shofer wheah to go, while I tuck these packages away. Hello,

hello! Doggon my soul!" he cried, as he felt the packages. "They's a big bottle in each one!" But the old man smilingly shook his head.

"*Niente, niente,*" he replied. "I jus' maka de wine to giva my frien's."

"I get you—a little holiday brew! Well, now, that's mighty sociable! You seem to have some loaves of bread an' some little fishes, too! Looks like we'd feed a multitude in a good old-fashioned Christian way!"

As he spoke, the big ranchman took out his roll, and peeling off some smaller bills, began slipping them into the packages. The car soon stopped at a tenement door—and then at another, and another, till the packages were all gone.

"These houses are plumb full of kids," chuckled the big Texan, as he came out of the last door. "An' the streets are full of 'em, too! So I tell you what I say we do—let's have a chil'ens' pahty now! Don't leave us, San Antonio—we need you in this outfit still! We'll go right back to your grocery store, an' then

to a toy an' candy place! How about it, Natalie?"

"Grand!"

"An' Uncle Jehosophat?"

"Yes, my boy," the old New Englander replied, "I think we're gettin' on the track of somethin' with real go to it!"

"I knew you had it in you, you old Yankee reprobate! We'll have one hell of a good time!"

And they did. For in response to his calls, a crowd of little boys and girls were soon madly chasing after the car; and on reaching the small grocery store, and the candy and toy shop close by, he used his magic money roll with such effect that his three companions were soon trotting in and out of doors, bringing armfuls of toys and candy and loaves and fishes and bottles of wine, while the host of the evening stood by the car and distributed them to the multitude.

"Come on now, friends!" he gayly called. "Saints an' sinnahs, old an' young! Come on, you little pickaninnies, come an' help old Santy Claus have a little fun tonight!"

And as fast as his hands were emptied, he urged old Uncle Jehosophat, the small girl from Arkansas and the beaming San Antonio to an even swifter pace. For an hour, the mad little party went on. It stopped only when both small shops had been quite emptied of their goods. Then, amid cheers from the joyous crowd, the Car of Croesus moved on again. The narrow, snowy streets were filled with many festive, singing groups, and most of them seemed to be going one way. Following, the car soon came to a quaint and lovely church, with tall white pillars at the front. Crowds poured through the open doors to a midnight Christmas service in there, and over their heads one caught a glimpse of long festoons of colored lights, while a thousand voices suddenly burst into the grand old Christmas hymn, *Adeste Fideles*.

“Eyetalians singin’ Come, All Ye Faithful! Well, now, what do you know about that?” demanded Uncle Jehosophat. He had been a fast worker for Santa Claus, and he had keenly enjoyed it, too; and though he was very tired now, the relish still showed in his dry old eyes. But



after they had listened a while, abruptly he turned to Miss Natalie Brown.

“Wa’n’t there something said,” he asked, “about a train to Arkansas?”

With a cry, she glanced at the watch on her wrist and begged their host to hurry up town. This he promptly agreed to do. But just as they were starting away, their affable guide of an hour ago came hurrying up to the car with a friend, a thin youngster with a pudgy face, small black moustache and beady eyes.

“I began to think I’d lost you, friends!” the little New Yorker cheerfully cried. “Find what you wanted here tonight?”

“We did,” the Texan answered. “We had one hell of a good time.”

“That’s splendid! And I found my friend! Could you take us along with you up town?”

With a keen glance and a slight smile, the big ranchman invited them in; and the intruders took the seats just in front of the trio inside.

“Well, well, well—there’s nothing like a good old-fashioned Christmas!” purred their happy

little guide. But when, leaving that festive region of lights, they swung over to the Bowery, now bleakly desolate and grim, as though its accustomed ways of life had little to do with this Christmas Eve, the youngster with the beady eyes turned on them abruptly, with a pistol in his hand.

“Stick ‘em up!” he snarled, and up went their hands. Miss Natalie Brown gave a choking cry; and as for Uncle Jehosophat, his grim old face grew pale with alarm. The young Texan only smiled straight into the eyes of their guide, who also held a gun in his hand. But Claire Cobb, in the front seat, turned sharply to the huge chauffeur.

“Can’t you do something? Quick!” she whispered. Out of his pocket, the Prince Borissovitch slipped the gun that he had used in his old Russian army days. From his lips came a chuckle of content.

“Wait, dear lady, wait,” he murmured. And almost imperceptibly the big car began to slow down. Behind them, the lad with the pudgy face was already going through the big, smiling

Texan's clothes; and the little New Yorker was saying, in his blandly friendly way:

"I hate to do this sort of thing—the rough stuff isn't in my line. So I keep this gentleman in my employ. He was the friend I spoke about, in that night club back up town, and he'd have got your roll so nicely if you'd only come inside. But when you Rubes got sentimental and came down here to the Wops instead, I 'phoned him to come right on down—and we've watched you throw your money around till the poor fellow got blue in the face. But this is no time for hard feelings, friends, so give us what's left, in a nice way, and we'll say Merry Christmas and call it a night."

"I thought you was up to somethin' like this," the big ranchman softly drawled, "an' I got kind of curious to see jest how you'd pull it off. But I declare I'm surprised at you, little Judas Iscariot. Why in hell did you wait till the money was gone?"

"Oh, it ain't gone," was the bland reply.

"I'm afraid it is," the other said. "A pity you-all waited so long. Fo' I'm only a poor

cow puncher, you see, havin' a little fling in this town. All I got left in this whole wide world is one measly five dollah bill an' a little rabbit's foot. An' I do hope you won't take that. It's such a lucky little thing."

The youngster with the beady eyes, deftly searching him all the while, found both the bill and the rabbit's foot. He spat on it and threw it aside. The cowboy smiled at that and drawled:

"Too bad to disappoint you, boys. I'm sorry that this scrumptious car led you-all to think me a millionaiah."

"Oh, I guess there ain't go'n' to be much disappointment. I wasn't thinking of you at all," their guide of the evening graciously said. "I got no time for pikers—I'm after bigger game tonight." And with a cheery smile, he turned to poor old Uncle Jehosophat, whose face had gone fairly green with rage. "I been on this old gentleman's trail ever since he hit New York, but I couldn't get a chance at him, till he come out of the marble halls up on Forty-Second Street and climbed into this car of his."

“It ain’t my car!” the old man snapped. “I never seen it before in my life!”

“Oh, tell that to the cuckoos,” the smiling little New Yorker replied. “You gotta roll on you right now that could pay for a coupla cars like this. I seen it at the ticket window. Make it quick and painless, Gus,” he said to his companion.

Quickly searching the angry old man, the latter snatched from an inside pocket a big, thick, black pocketbook; and when opened, it revealed such a wealth of crinkly yellow bills, that the rat gave a sharp, hoarse squeal of delight!

But all this time, the Car of Croesus, imperceptibly slowing down, had at last come to a stop. And the huge chauffeur now appeared at the window with a gun, which he smilingly shoved into the pudgy face close by. The door flew open and the rat was jerked out backwards by his collar and flung by the powerful arm of the Prince into a pile of snow close by. Meanwhile the big Texan, quick as a flash, had knocked the gun from the other crook’s hand and had tucked the wriggling little fellow

roughly and firmly under his arm. A whirlwind of action then took place, in which laughs and spanks and squeals were heard!

"Ouch! Quit it! Stop! You're ticklin' me!" squealed the frantic little chap.

"Doggon my soul!" the ranchman roared. "I nevah did have so much fun in my life!"

And he hurled the squealing little shyster out into the snowy night. Then he turned back, still chuckling, and restored the pocketbook to its owner's trembling hands. In his face was a look of amused reproach.

"Why, Uncle Jehosophat," he asked, "how could you keep such worldly wealth on such a scrumptious Christmas Eve?"

"I did use some of it, back in that store," the old man answered, quite unabashed. A faint, grim smile showed on his face. "But I thought it might be just as well if one of us kept money enough to get this party home," he said.

"Home? Where *you* goin'?"

"Oklahoma."

"Hal-lee-lujah! Ain't that fine? Then we can *all* get on that train!"

“How can we?” came the sharp retort; and the Texan met the challenging eyes of the little girl from Arkansas. “So you’re only a poor cow puncher!” she said. Humbly he took off his hat.

“Yes, ma’am,” he meekly answered, “that’s why little ladies are afraid I’ll step on their feet when I dance with ’em.” Out came her small friendly hand.

“Put it there, Texas!” said Arkansas. “You can dance with me whenever you like! And if you want to make it soon, there’s a grand jazz party at Pine Bluffs, set for just two nights from now!”

“I’ll be with you, Hon!” he cried.

“But how will you? And how will I? How you go’n’ to get me on that train?”

“Why, Hon,” said the smiling, lean young man, “I haven’t smoked since I got in this car—an’ if I can jest roll a few cigarettes, that’ll be bunk enough fo’ me. I’d rather smoke than sleep tonight.”

“What? Give me your berth, while you sit up all night in a cold, dirty smoking car?” she cried.



“Oh, I guess there ain’t any need of that,” said old Uncle Jehosophat. “I got staterooms for you both—and we’ll eat a Christmas dinner that’ll make you feel you’re home again! I’ve a damn good darky cook on that car——”

“You mean to say,” demanded Miss Brown, “that you’re the old oil magnate who hitched his car onto our train?”

“I am,” the magnate drily said.

“She’d like to wring your fat old neck!” chuckled the Texan at her side. But nobody wrung any necks, and it was a genial trio that the Car of Croesus left at the Grand Central Station that night.

“You’ve forgotten your rabbit’s foot!” cried Claire Cobb; and as the cowboy stooped to get it, she deftly slipped into his overcoat pocket the money he had paid for the car.

“Merry Christmas!”

“Merry Christmas, ma’am!”

And Texas and Oklahoma and Arkansas hurried off to their train.

## CHAPTER XII

“TODAY,” said Claire Cobb, “you are going to meet Uncle Plinny Barnes of Iowa.”

It was two months later, the first of March. She had just come out of her hotel, smartly dressed as a lady's maid, and had stepped into the front seat of the long, immaculate Car of Croesus, by the side of the huge chauffeur in his faultless maroon livery. The Prince turned on her his whimsical smile.

“Tell me about him, dear lady,” he said. And on their way to the Grand Central, his young partner explained.

“I first met Uncle Plinny through his niece, Annabelle,” she said, “for in Chicago I knew her well. Annabelle Barnes had a wonderful voice; and as a young girl, she used to sing at the radio station in her Uncle Plinny's store. It's a big mail-order house, in a small town in Iowa; her father is his partner there; they run the radio as an ad, and it has become the pride

of their lives; so it was a blow when Annabelle went off to Chicago and later to Paris. She has studied abroad for about five years and is now back here in New York, in the Metropolitan Opera; but she hasn't had a single chance at anything but minor rôles, though she has been here since October. And her father and Uncle Plin have grown steadily more annoyed. Plinny came East a month ago and had a little talk with me.

“ ‘What tries my Christian patience,’ he said, ‘is this dog-in-the-manger policy. The fact that they won’t let her sing in their picayune little Opera House ain’t hurting my feelings very much, for the future of music in this country is on God’s free air, my dear. What I want is to build Annie’s radio rep. And they’ve sewed her up with a contract that won’t let her near a Mike!’ By which he meant a microphone.

“ ‘I tried to comfort him with the thought that the Opera would give her a chance before the season ended.

“ ‘If they do,’ he said, ‘you wire me, and me and her father will come right on.’

“Well, the chance has come at last. She’s to sing Mimi in *Bohème* tonight. I wired her uncle and here’s his reply.” And with a smile of relish, Claire Cobb read this telegram:

“God bless your soul. Now please stick by us. See to her costumes and spare no expense. Kindly reserve for night of performance two hundred seats at opera and ditto beds first-class hotels for self and party without fail. Engage all time on Purple Network radio station WOR from Friday noon to midnight and also your car with prince chauffeur none too good for Annabelle. Meet New York Century Friday morning for busy day. Signed—Plinny Barnes.”

The great black eyes of the Prince Borissovitch twinkled with anticipation. He asked:

“And what does Annabelle say to all this?”

“Oh, she doesn’t like it much, and neither does the publicity man of the Metropolitan,” Claire replied.

At the Grand Central, she met them both. Annabelle was a plump, pretty little brunette, who had quite a cosmopolitan air; and her press agent, Bernardo, was an equally pretty and

equally plump, suave little man, with a tiny blond moustache.

“We’ve got to be mighty careful, my dear,” he warned the prima donna, “or we’ll have every music critic in town treating your début as a farce. This is opera, not burlesque, and we can’t pull any vulgarity here. What does your uncle want with all that time on WOR? If he thinks he can put you on the air, he’ll find he has made a big mistake!”

“He may want to do some broadcasting,” suggested Claire, “on his own account.”

“I know he will, I know he will!” the anxious prima donna cried. “Oh, Claire, I’m worried sick over this!”

“Why, Annabelle. Ashamed of your uncle? And of your own father, too?”

“Not a bit of it! You know I’m not! I love them both—they’re darlings! But they have their own ideas of publicity!” wailed Annabelle; she fairly shivered at the thought. “And you’ve no idea how horrid these New York critics can be, when amused!”

“They mustn’t be!” Bernardo declared.

"Your uncle has got to understand that the Metropolitan Opera can't have a mob of Hicks from the wilds making a joke of its affairs!"

"Wait till you see them," murmured Claire Cobb.

And a few minutes later, when, from a whole special section of the Century Limited reserved for the party of Mr. Barnes, a crowd of well-dressed, prosperous-looking men and women poured through the gate, she turned to the press agent with a smile.

"Here are the Hicks," she told him. Bernardo stared, in pleased surprise.

"Why, these are people," he exclaimed, "that I can work with! This is fine! Where's Uncle Plinny?" he asked Claire.

"Right there, with his little brother Cliff."

At the head of his big party, quiet and easy and self-assured, shambled a lean, stoop-shouldered man, with a sober little one at his side. Annabelle had run forward to meet them; she fervently embraced them both and soon became the center of a vociferous crowd of old friends. Some of their voices had a twang that grated

on Bernardo's ears; but they were dressed well anyway, and he now saw a story in accord with operative dignity here. Suavely smiling, he pushed in, with a couple of newspaper men—only two, for he had notified only the least sensational members of the New York evening press. Introduced by Annabelle, he warmly extended his soft, plump hand.

“I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Barnes. The Metropolitan Opera has commissioned me to welcome you all and to be at your service, while you're in town, for any little things you need to make your visit comfortable.”

Good-humoredly Uncle Plinny Barnes looked down at the little man and drawled:

“Well, now, that's mighty nice of you, Mr. Bernardo. We'll keep you in mind. But I guess we'll be pretty comfortable, thanks. We've brought forty thousand dollars to spend and we're going back home by tomorrow's train.”

As he spoke, he seemed blandly oblivious of the two reporters listening; but when they came forward, his whole long, leathery face warmed up and a twinkle appeared in his pale blue eyes.



“Why, hello, boys, glad to see you. Meet my little brother Cliff, proud father of our prima donna, Annabelle Barnes, of Ioway. We’ve come on to hear her sing tonight and tell the country how it feels to hear a real American girl in New York opera at last.”

Genially answering questions, he led his big party out of the station; and at the Car of Croesus, he urged the reporters in cordial tones:

“S’pose you two fellahs get right into my niece’s car with her and me? I’m go’n’ to be pretty busy today, and this car will be my headquarters; so if you want any more for your stories, I’ll fill you up as we ride around.” He waved his hand at the huge chauffeur. “This is Prince Boris of Russia, boys. We feel the best is none too good for our little prima donna. But where is Madam de Vivo?” he asked. And when Claire Cobb, demure and chic in her costume of lady’s maid, took her place beside the chauffeur, he confided to the reporters: “French maid from Paree—a nice little thing. I can’t speak her lingo, but she’s been a mighty good chape-

rone to my niece. Now, Cliff, get taxis for our crowd and take 'em all to the hotel. Then meet me at WOR. And Mr. Bernardo, you hop in here and help me handle the New York press."

"Oh, I guess you don't need any help, Mr. Barnes." The suave little man was rapidly dismissing all anxiety. "I'd only suggest," he added, "that it might be a good idea to take the prima donna home. We don't want any excitement, you know; we want her to sing her best tonight."

"You betcha—and we'll see that she does. We want to handle this whole business in a way to give it a tone that will really help this girl's career."

"Exactly," Mr. Bernardo purred.

As the big car rolled out of the station, the chauffeur remarked to the maid:

"Your *enfant terrible* from the West is not so very wild, my dear." But Claire's eyes glittered.

"Give him time!"

"Well, now, gentlemen, fire away," Uncle Plinny was saying behind them.

“Where did your niece first sing, Mr. Barnes?”

“That’s a pretty long story, boys, but I’ll cut it short as I can. You see, my brother Cliff and I run a store out there in Ioway. Not the little old general store of the past, where the neighbors got around the stove—no, we use the parcel post and do a mail-order business with two hundred thousand customers, in a neighborhood of a hundred miles. They all have cars, these neighbors of ours, and there’s not a day when some of ’em don’t drop in to see me at the store. But most of ’em are too busy for that, for business is booming out our way; so about ten years ago, my brother Cliff rigged up a radio station at our place; and it’s grown till it reaches a couple of million neighbors about every night—in a sociable family way. And that’s where my niece began her career, when she was a little thing of fifteen. My stars, I can still remember you on Sunday evenings, Annabelle, singing *Nearer, My God and Lead, Kindly Light*.”

“Yes, Uncle Plin,” said Annabelle. But her

voice sounded a bit faint, and both she and Mr. Bernardo began to be uneasy now. As though noticing this, her Uncle Plin looked suddenly out of the window at the splendors of Fifth Avenue, and added, in a humble tone:

“But, boys, how picayune it sounds compared to this great city of yours. By George, what shops, what women, what clothes! What evidence on every side of boundless wealth and culture here! You make all the rest of us look mighty small. I don’t know what this country would do, without New York to lead us on. And I tell you, Cliff and me will be mighty proud of our girl tonight!”

Mr. Bernardo was beaming again; but Annabelle, though deeply touched by these last words of her Uncle Plinny, still looked anxious. She knew him well.

“Oh, Uncle, darling,” she murmured, “I’m proud of you, too, and I love you so. But you will be careful, won’t you, dear? Remember those music critics tonight. They’re not half so kind as these gentlemen here.”

Her uncle put one long arm around her.

“Just you leave it to me, little girl. I’ll do nothing to rile those critics, my dear, for they live in a different world from mine and they won’t even know what I’m about. I’ll talk to a bigger jury tonight and I think I know what their verdict will be. Now have a good rest before the performance. Just drop all thought of us out of your head.”

## CHAPTER XIII

THEY left her at her hotel considerably reassured. Then they went to a Broadway skyscraper, not far from the Opera House; and after leaving Bernardo and his two newspaper friends, Mr. Barnes took Claire with him into the building and went up to the headquarters of radio station WOR. They remained for nearly an hour, and then she came smiling down to the Prince.

“Well,” she announced, “Uncle Plin has begun! You should have seen how his manner changed when he’d shaken Bernardo off his trail! When we came into the big station up there, he shook hands with announcers and engineers, and said:

“ ‘Boys, this feels like home to me! I guess I’ll leave my suit case here! Now will somebody show me a telephone?’

“He then directed me to call up every newspaper in New York, evening and morning, the

yellow press and even the loudest tabloid sheets. On the back of an old envelope, Uncle Plin had a list of 'em all.

“ ‘Tell 'em that by a gross error,’ he said, ‘they weren’t informed of our arrival. Tell 'em a little about us, my dear, and add that if they want to see me, they can do so at City Hall—for I wired ahead to the Mayor and have a date with him at noon.’

“Just what’s to happen at City Hall, I can’t for the life of me make out. But whatever it is, it will go on the air—for Cliff has just gone down ahead with a WOR engineer and a portable short-wave transmitter, to be ready to hook up to the Purple Network here.” The Prince gave her a puzzled glance. “The Purple Network,” she explained, “is one of the few big systems that hook up the entire country.”

“Hook up? Hook up? What is that? What are they hooking the country for?” the bewildered Russian asked.

“For Annabelle!” Claire Cobb replied. “He has begun broadcasting already! He started by advertising his store, as you heard him do



an hour ago, and then told how he'd brought all Iowa East, to see that their State's own prima donna gets a square deal in New York tonight!"

The next moment, Mr. Plinny Barnes shambled out of the building, with his teeth on a long cigar.

"Now, Prince, if you don't mind," he said, "we'll go right down to City Hall. Does this smoke bother you?" he asked Claire.

"No, Uncle Plin."

"Then get in here with me," he replied. And as the car started, he laid his hand kindly and anxiously on hers. "You didn't mind me calling you Madam de Vivo to those boys!" She smiled and gave his hand a squeeze.

"Of course I didn't!" she answered. "It was just the line to take!" His troubled expression quickly cleared.

"I felt pretty sure you'd see it that way. They like things kind of Frenchy here, so we've got to supply it," he said. "We've all of us got to get behind our little girl and push her through. Now how about her costumes?"

“They’re ravishing!”

“Good. You spared no expense?”

“No, I took her to Thurn’s and Bendel’s, and they’ve been working day and night!” Again his big hand closed on hers.

“I knew I could count on you,” he said. “And I may have to do so again before this shindig’s over.” Thoughtfully he wrinkled his brows over the smoke of his cigar. “Think you could get up a banquet for about two hundred tonight?” Claire swallowed abruptly.

“Oh, yes,” she replied, “in this business of ours, I’m used to little things like that!”

“Fine. If it’s needed, I’ll let you know. You might just set your mind on it now, while I do some thinking myself about what I’ll say at City Hall.”

On arriving down there, they found little Cliff and the WOR engineer setting up their microphones out on the steps. Quite a crowd of curious idlers had already gathered about, and several newspaper men had arrived; and as Mr. Barnes went into the building, one of them came to the car.

“What’s the story?” he asked the chauffeur. The enormous face of the Prince Borissovitch expressed complete bewilderment.

“They are hooking the country!” he explained. The pleased reporter chuckled at that and turned to the chic French lady’s maid who, speaking with a Paris accent, told him what he wished to know. Uncle Plinny then appeared on the steps, with the dapper Mayor of New York at his side. The crowd had grown to thousands now, but Mr. Plinny Barnes had time for only a perfunctory smile at these mere New Yorkers. He had a larger throng in mind; and coming close to the microphones, he spoke to the millions in the West.

“Well, friends,” he drawled, “this is Plinny Barnes, broadcasting over WOR from the steps of City Hall in New York. Since I spoke to you an hour ago, I’ve come down here to do my best for our little girl from Ioway, who is singing the star rôle at the Opera tonight. I’ve asked the Mayor to give her a hand by being our guest at a banquet and coming with us to the show. And Jimmy has kindly consented to that, and is

now right here at my side. So you see the City of New York is waking up at last to the fact that the West can suckle songsters as good as any across the sea. Our little girl trained over there, but she wants me to tell you she's glad to be home. Or if she ain't quite home as yet, at least she's on her way there. She's coming back to God's country, friends, and has already got as far as New York. She'd like to sing to you all tonight; and although the Opera has sewed her up in a contract that won't let her near a Mike, I'm go'n' to see what I can do to work in a little democracy here. It seems only fair she should sing to you, for that was how she began her career. Many of you already know of Barnes and Barnes of Ioway. We do a mail-order business, which I don't hesitate to say will soon cover the whole Middle West. Send for our catalogue some day. We run a radio station, too. When Annabelle was a little thing, she used to sing to you out there. And by the Almighty, if I can arrange it, she's go'n' to sing to you also tonight! Now I guess that will be all for the pres-

ent, unless the Mayor wants to say a few words.”

“I do,” said the Mayor, stepping into his place. “I don’t like this little idea that New York isn’t home to Americans. I’ve known Plinny Barnes for twenty minutes, and he’s already a friend of mine; so I’m giving him a motor-cycle escort while he is in town—and I’m going to be at that dinner tonight and I’m going to the opera. Only sorry you can’t all be there. But I’d stick around your radios till pretty late, if I were you; for this man Barnes has made up his mind to put this little girl on the air. He seems to have something up his sleeve. And his sleeve is about five feet long—while his head, if I may say so, seems to be even longer still. So here’s good luck to Ioway.”

“Thanks, Jimmy,” Mr. Barnes replied, shambling back to the microphone. “The next time you come out our way, drop in and see us at the big store, and we’ll fit you out with a new suit of clothes. Now, friends, I’ll leave you for a while, for I see two motor-cycle cops gathered ’round my niece’s car; so I’ll tell Prince Boris,

her chauffeur, to step on the gas and let her ride. Hello, here's a moving-picture man—and there comes another on the run—and there seem to be reporters from all the New York papers here. Funny how the word gets 'round. They're filming us now, and me and the Mayor are trying to smile our prettiest. The crowd is about ten thousand strong. The police are clearing a path to our car. So good-bye, all; and thanks, Mr. Mayor, for all this help you're giving us. Don't forget your swallow-tail tonight, for we dress like that at the opera."

A few moments later, the Car of Croesus, ploughing through a demonstrative throng, started up Broadway at full speed, with the motor cycles roaring ahead.

"Ah," sighed the Prince, as his huge foot pressed down on the accelerator, "I have wished since the war to be going like this!"

"Look at those taxis behind us!" cried Claire.

"If I look, dear lady," he replied, "away from my driving, I may hook some New Yorkers far up into the sky."

"There must be a dozen taxis," she cried,

“all filled with reporters and cameras and all of them madly on our trail! Uncle Plinny has lighted a fresh cigar!”

His drawling voice came out through the tube:

“What’s the speedometer say, little girl?”

“Seventy-five!” she answered.

“Good. We may have to use this car tonight as no car was used before.”

“Good Heavens! How?”

“Oh, don’t be impatient. You’ll learn it all as time goes on. Everything’s gone pretty smoothly so far, and the banquet tonight is at six o’clock—our supper time in Ioway.” Claire Cobb gave a nervous glance at her watch. “I’ll leave it all to you,” he said. “Draw on me for what money you need and don’t be too frugal with flowers and flags. You’ll find two flags of Ioway in a package for me at the hotel desk. No alcoholic drinks, of course, get up some kind of punch instead. And tell the chef I’ll gladly pay for whatever he puts into it. As to exactly what goes in, that’s between his conscience and his God. We’ll also need a good jazz band. I’d advise you to spare no expense on that.”



"But, Uncle Plin," she shouted back, above the roar of the speeding car and the howl of the sirens just ahead, "this dinner alone may cost you two thousand!"

"Never mind about that, little girl. I'm cashing in forty times that amount by all this free publicity. It isn't just for myself, understand; for when my brother Cliff and me pass on into the Great Hereafter, the business will go to Annabelle, so we're piling up her fortune here. Now do what I say and spare no pains to make that dinner a real success. Better have a few extra covers laid, for we may make a few more friends in this big city as time goes on."

But he found no friends at the Opera House. The loud, hoarse sirens of the police brought little Bernardo out of doors, and he looked on the procession of cars with fast deepening dismay. Behind the Car of Croesus, reporters and moving-picture men were tumbling out of taxis; and like wolves they gathered close, as Uncle Plinny faced his prey.

"Well, Mr. Bernardo," he began, with a kind and friendly air, "I've got a little piece of news

that'll just tickle you to death. The Mayor's coming to the show tonight." Mr. Bernardo tried to look tickled.

"Capital!" he answered; and then he murmured *sotto voce*: "But suppose we step inside?"

"Oh, why not stay out here a while?" asked Mr. Barnes reproachfully. "I'd hate to disappoint these boys—and besides, the American public has a right to know about this. This whole question is becoming one of national interest."

"What question?" the press agent snapped. And gently Uncle Plinny explained, with his kind and friendly smile:

"Is our little girl, who was born in the West, to be allowed to send her voice out into the great open spaces tonight?"

The reporters seemed to relish this line, and Mr. Bernardo grew pale with concern; but with a brave effort, he forced back some semblance of his bland little smile.

"I should say that the person to answer that is the artist herself," he suavely replied. "She

knows the demands of the opera world and we've worked together in perfect accord. She signed a contract with us last summer to make no engagements outside for a year."

"I know, Brother Shylock, it's not in the bond," said Mr. Barnes good-humoredly. "But how about a little of the quality of mercy here?" One of the tabloid newspaper men gave a sharp chortle of delight, but the tall Westerner went on, in a tone of pleading, mild reproach: "For I tell you that before I get through, about ten million friends of mine will be hungry to hear her sing tonight."

"Now, Mr. Barnes, be sensible!" begged little Bernardo, in growing alarm. "We've never yet used microphones in a regular performance here; and even if we wanted to, it would be quite impossible to arrange them by tonight!"

"How about it, Cliff?" asked Uncle Plin. Quiet as a little mouse, his brother had just joined the group with the WOR engineer, each one of them lugging a heavy valise. In a business-like tone, Cliff answered:

"Let's go in and have a look at the hall."

“By all means! Let’s go inside!” agreed Bernardo fervently. Uncle Plinny seemed reluctant to leave behind his newspaper friends; but after having invited them all to be his guests at the banquet that night, he went into the Opera House, taking Claire Cobb along with him. She was in there for some time; and then she came out to the prince-chauffeur.

“Well,” she announced, “they had quite a talk. On the big, empty stage of the Opera House, Cliff and his friend took a look around and said that a hook-up could be arranged. But various high and mighty officials had come to Bernardo’s support by then, and they insisted on holding Annabelle to the terms of her bond. A reporter, however, then brought in the news that the speculators outside were already selling seats at twenty dollars apiece for tonight. The officials grew more friendly at that and Uncle Plinny saw his chance.

“ ‘This is costing me in the neighborhood of sixty thousand dollars,’ he said. ‘Why not let me spend it in my own way and crowd your house to the roof tonight?’

“This point impressed them quite a bit and it

ended in a compromise. They won't let Annabelle go on the air, but Uncle Plin is to be allowed to have a telephone on the stage, connected with WOR, and from there he will report the entire performance tonight."

## CHAPTER XIV

AT this point, Mr. Plinny Barnes came serenely out of the Opera House. He got into the car and off they went to his hotel, where his large party was waiting for lunch. But Claire Cobb had no time for that. All afternoon she dashed around to florists and to caterers and bureaus for jazz orchestras; and at six o'clock that night, the great ballroom of the hotel was a grandly festive scene. But when at last the Mayor arrived, and the jazz band crashed into action and the guests trooped gayly in, Claire left them and came out to the car.

"Now we'll have a quick supper," she said, "and then we'll go get Annabelle, to take her to the Opera House. I'm afraid she'll be frightfully worried, poor dear."

And Annabelle was. She had been besieged by reporters all day. As the car started off and her ears were assailed by the bellowing sirens of the police, she gave a little scream of dismay;

and it was all that Claire could do to calm the nervous prima donna.

"I love the old darlings," she anxiously cried, "but I tell you, Claire, you've no idea how nasty these music critics can be! They'll make a joke of me tonight! And that's not all—for I know Uncle Plin is determined to have me go on the air! Sooner or later he'll ask me to do it before this night is over, my dear! And I simply can't! It means my contract—my whole operatic career!"

In spite of all that Claire could say, they left her at the Opera House in no easy frame of mind. Then they got Uncle Plinny at his hotel, where the banquet had been a complete success. In the car, he told Claire that the Mayor had been in his happiest vein and that over twenty newspaper people had been there, including several European correspondents and one from Japan. All had been keenly interested in his story of Annabelle and of the astounding growth of the mail-order house of Barnes and Barnes.

"Well, well," he chuckled, "it's a small



world. That punch helped, too," he added, blithely puffing his cigar.

But at the Seventh Avenue stage entrance of the Opera House, they found Cliff waiting; and his little mouse-like face did not look so cheerful now.

"Plinny," he said, in a low tone, "I've begun to think they're putting over some mighty dirty work on us here!"

"What's the trouble?"

"I don't know, Plin, but it's in the whole dang-blasted atmosphere! The way these fellahs act and smile! I'm afraid they're onto us!"

"All right, Cliff, we'll go right in. Claire, you come, too. Go to Annabelle's dressing room and get her to quit worrying. She has 'phoned me twice this afternoon."

So Claire went to Annabelle, and Uncle Plinny scouted around with Cliff for signs of trouble ahead. But the vast operatic machine was getting into motion now and nobody had time for them.

"I guess you just imagined it, Cliff. You're nervous," his tall partner said. "Now hustle

into that dressing room and get on your swallow-tail. You're to sit in the box with the Mayor, when he comes."

Mr. Pliny Barnes then went to his post. Behind a wing on the great, busy stage, he took his place at the telephone connecting with WOR; and after testing it out a bit, he began, in a low, incisive voice, to his big audience in the West:

"Well, friends, this is Plinny Barnes again—of Barnes and Barnes of Ioway—broadcasting over WOR to the entire U. S. A., from the stage of the Metropolitan Opera House in New York—where Annabelle Barnes will sing tonight. They haven't started up as yet, so I'll give you a picture of the house. The galleries are all packed to the roof for our little prima donna, and they tell me they're selling seats outside for as high as thirty dollars each. The orchestra seats aren't filled as yet—these New Yorkers like their dinners, it seems—and only a few are straggling into the Golden Horseshoe boxes—those gilded seats of the so-called mighty which the world of fashion holds.

“But here comes some of our crowd! Yes, sir, all of ’em, two hundred strong—from Ioway—in evening clothes! . . . And here comes the Mayor of New York! We’ve got a box for him tonight! Cliff is with him—Clifford Barnes, my partner, friends, of the Ioway firm of Barnes and Barnes—doing a mail-order business covering half the Middle West! It’s his daughter and my niece who is breaking into opera tonight. New York has never had much use for peoples’ voices out our way—they say we have a nasal twang. But they’re go’n’ to hear a voice tonight that tells the same old story, friends, of how the West can wallop the world in each and every walk of life!” He broke off and looked at his watch.

“It’s about time they started this show. We were due to begin at eight, and here it is eight-seventeen—and I can hear the fiddlers still tuning up down there in front. . . . They tell me the big Wop tenor was late. But he’s in his dressing room now and the scene is all set for him to come on. And it may look pretty good from the front but it isn’t much to look at from

here. . . . Hello—we're off! The orchestra has begun the overture. The whole big house is crowded now—they've turned down the lights and it looks as though we'd soon get a little action here. . . . Be patient, friends—remember that I am not running this show. I'm just Uncle Plinny Barnes—uncle of Miss Annabelle Barnes, the budding prima donna tonight, who first went on the air, as a child, away out at Station B and B—meaning Barnes and Barnes of Ioway! And friends, we are still hoping to get her back on the air tonight!

“Here she comes from her dressing room—with Madam de Vivo, her French maid. I'd like her to say a few words to you, friends, and I know that she would like to, too. But there isn't time just now, she's standing waiting for her cue. . . . The music is getting soft and low and kind of dreamy. There she goes! She's moving out on the great stage—and now they're giving her a hand—all our crowd out there in front and a good many New Yorkers, too—including the Mayor up in his box—for we've made quite a number of friends in this town.

. . . She's singing! And they like it, friends—they seem to like it—it sounds fine! What a shame that you can't hear it, too! Maybe you will before we're through!" . . .

While Uncle Plinny talked on in this vein, little Cliff had slipped out of his box and had been prowling through the lobbies, questioning ushers. He looked at his watch, then hurried outdoors; and on reaching the car, he ordered the Prince to take him to WOR. He skurried into the building there and in a few minutes out he came.

"What do you think they've done!" he cried. "The Opera has hired the Mike on the Purple Network from midnight on! Do you get it? They've dished us—blocked our game!"

"They have dished you?" repeated the puzzled Prince.

"They have!" the little man replied. "We'd been planning all along to put my daughter on the air at eleven-thirty tonight!"

"But I thought the little prima donna refused to sing to the radio!"

"Oh, we had a way to get over that, so she'd

never have known she *was* on the air! But that little rat Bernardo has sniffed us out and blocked our game! They've shilly-shallied the performance till it's half an hour late! She won't be free till midnight now—and Bernardo's got the time at the radio station from twelve to one! That's ten to eleven in Ioway! After that is too late! The folks are in bed! Now take me back to the Opera House!"

It was only two or three blocks away. On reaching it, Cliff hurried inside and very soon came out again, with his lank partner at his side. He was talking in a tense, low voice. Uncle Plinny was lighting a fresh cigar.

"All right, Cliff, I get you," calmly he said. "Now let's just try to keep our heads and see if we can't trump his ace. Let me cogitate a while."

Quietly he got into the car; and on their ride to the radio station, he sat smoking, in deep thought. His long face wrinkled in a smile.

"I'm thinking of Mr. Bernardo," he said. "I think he's a little rooster, Cliff, and he is

more than likely to take a rooster's view of this. He'll think he's got us licked for fair—and he'll get careless. That's our chance."

A few moments later, Mr. Barnes shambled into the skyscraper that houses WOR—with Cliff trotting close behind. In a short time, they reappeared.

"Now, Prince," he said to the huge chauffeur, "I want to go away up town—but I see the motor-cycle boys are with us still, so I guess the ride won't take us long."

And as they rushed off, sirens screaming ahead, Uncle Plin settled back and puffed his cigar, and placidly drawled:

"It's just as I thought. Bernardo's got careless. He has taken the time, all right, and the Opera will pay for it, too; but he didn't think it worth their while to provide any program for the Mike. And that shows a high and mighty contempt for the great station WOR, which will make its owner about as pleased as a cat when you shy a boot at her. We're going to see that owner now and I'm a-go'n' to talk to him as one radio man to another. The trouble with



these Opera boys is putting too much faith in contracts. They forget there's such a thing as human nature in this world. Now let me finish this cigar and think about human nature a while."

When they reached the handsome home of the owner of WOR, Uncle Plinny went in and was there for some time. Then he strolled out to the car and said:

"Now, Prince, we'll go back to the Opera House." And on the way down town, he announced: "Well, Cliff, I guess the way is clear. That feller was as human as even a radio man can be. He's got to live up to his contract, of course, but he wa'n't at all pleased with this idea of feeding the Purple Network for a whole hour on empty air; and he couldn't see any reason at all why, if our program wa'n't quite finished on the stroke of midnight, we shouldn't go on for a little while—'until the next party shows up,' he said."

"By Jupiter!" gasped little Cliff. "Why, Plinny, that means we'll put this through at the Metropolitan's expense!"

“It seems so, Cliff, it seems so. I tell you, human nature’s a thing you don’t ever want to shut out of your head. Now you can go right on, just as we planned. It’ll be something new in the radio line, and it’s go’n’ to please the country, Cliff, and do quite a little to spread the fame of the radio station of Barnes and Barnes.”

Little Cliff was convulsively chuckling.

“Plin, you’re a genius!” he declared. And back at the Opera House, he said: “Now go on with your talk in there on the stage, so the folks out West won’t go to bed—and leave the technical stuff to me!”

The technical stuff took an hour or more, and the only man who watched Cliff work was the Prince Ivan Borissovitch of Russia, who could make nothing of it at all. Returning to the radio station, Cliff came out with his engineer friend and the same valises they had used at City Hall. They had the Prince drive to a quiet side street, and there the two wizards set to work, with batteries and wires and a little microphone. When they had finished, the

car inside looked just about as it had before, except that beside the Prince on the floor were a couple of small steel boxes, and upon the floor behind stood an innocent-looking valise. They then rushed the engineer back to WOR; and after that, while the Car of Croesus slowly toured about the town, the huge chauffeur began to feel that his passenger was going insane. For the little man back there sat talking, talking, talking, apparently into the empty air! And more and more excited he grew! Twice he stopped and dashed into a cigar store, where he used a telephone. And after the last of these brief stops, he came out triumphantly.

“Prince, it’s perfect!” he declared. “Now back to the Opera P. D. Q.!”

On arriving there, he hurried inside; but he soon came out again into the car and almost at once started talking again, this time in clear and measured tones, as though addressing a vast throng—a throng of people as mad as himself—for to the puzzled Russian chauffeur came only such bewildering bits as—“broadcasting as we go” . . . “portable short-wave transmitter”

. . . "hook up" . . . "Purple Network" . . .  
and "Mike."

"Croesus!" fervently murmured the Prince. And when Claire Cobb came out to him, he turned on her a distracted glance.

"What are these little steel boxes here?" she asked, as she took her place at his side.

"Dear lady, they are hooks!" he whispered. "These fellows are hooking something still!"

At this, she gave a little start and looked suspiciously about; but before she had time to get anything clear, Uncle Plinny emerged from the stage door, with his little niece beside him. At the same moment, she heard the click of a switch behind and then Cliff's voice, low, sharp and clear:

"Here she comes! Be patient, friends, one minute more, and you'll hear a budding prima donna start her radio career!"

The plump little singer was wrapped in furs; and as she got into the car, her eyes still shone from her success.

"It all went splendidly!" she declared. "You should have heard the things they said, three of

the best critics in town, when they came to my dressing room!"

"I'm glad, my dear," said Uncle Plin. And he added, in quiet tones: "They're probably writing their stories now. In a few minutes more, they'll be on the press, and your reputation will be made. But now," he continued wistfully, "how about giving a little time to your poor old uncle and your dad?" He put his long arm around her and his hand drew tighter the curtain in the window at her side. "We're feeling kind of blue tonight, for we feel New York has stolen our girl. You'll be so famous after this. And we're wondering if you'll ever again sing to us the dear old songs you used to sing in Ioway?"

"Sing them? Why of course I will!" cried the girl indignantly. "You old darlings, don't I owe my whole career to you, from the start? I'll sing to you whenever you like!"

"Then do it now," begged Uncle Plin.

"What? Right in the car?" she laughed.

"With all Broadway looking on?"

"Oh, no," her uncle answered. "Cliff, draw

those curtains on your side, and we'll go up into the Park. And as we go, sing soft and low," he begged her, turning back to his niece. "*Sing Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes*; and after that, *Lead, Kindly Light*."

Amused but touched, the girl obeyed. Shut in by the curtains from curious eyes, as the big car sped up Broadway at fifty miles an hour, with the hoarse, deep sirens of their escort far ahead, she sang to both old darlings—sang till the tears came into their eyes—tears of such real joy as was seen nowhere else in the great city that night. In the shadowy Park, they went 'round and 'round; for each time that she stopped, they begged for more. But the weary little prima donna insisted at last she could sing no more. So they took her back to her hotel. And there by the entrance stood Bernardo, haggard and gray and grim with rage.

"Well, Mademoiselle," he snapped at her, glaring in at the door of the car, "how about that contract now?"

"Contract, contract?"

"No lies, if you please!" the furious little

man replied. "I got wind of it half an hour ago! Been hunting for you ever since—to stop this outrage!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that for over an hour you've sung to the whole raw blithering West!" She drew herself up indignantly.

"I most certainly have not! I've not been near a radio!"

"Oh, haven't you?" Snatching the window curtain aside, he revealed a microphone about ten inches from her face! "*Now* what have you got to say for yourself?"

Annabelle had nothing to say. She took one look and burst into tears! But Uncle Plinny did the talking.

"Never mind him, little girl," he said, with his arm around her still. "If he can't take his licking like a he-man, let him sputter a bit. Why should we care? What was it that you wanted tonight? Good notices from those critics, dear. And they've written 'em now and gone to bed, so that part of your evening has turned out fine! As for this last hour, I doubt



if the Opera will row very loud about how they was fooled by us Rubes from the West. But even if they should let you go, they'll soon be on their knees to get you back. For millions of people have heard you now. They've also heard of Barnes and Barnes. And that all counts for you, my dear, for the business will all be yours in time, and no prima donna ever got hurt by being left a millionaire!"

Blandly he turned to Bernardo outside.

"And as for you, young man," he said, "I guess you're pretty good for New York. But come out to Ioway some day and we'll teach you about publicity."

## CHAPTER XV

ANOTHER month went quickly by and then the scene of the adventures of the Car of Croesus shifted to the Sunny South. An observant passenger in one of the many pleasure planes soaring over the lovely old State of Virginia, that April afternoon, might have seen a dark glistening speck below, moving swiftly along the road from Washington to Richmond; and had he swooped down for a closer look, the speck would have grown to a long low car with rounded hood, in color black and rich maroon, which sped along, sleek as a cat and discreetly purring with content, as though it were softly telling the world:

“Great wealth is here. See for yourself. We’re so rich we don’t have to make any noise.”

It had come from New York, the day before, and was to pick up its passengers in Richmond just ahead, that night. In front, beside the huge chauffeur in his impeccable livery, sat a chic

young lady's maid, simply, expensively dressed in black. For Claire Cobb had a young cousin down in Louisiana, who was now on her way up North and who greatly needed a motor like this, and also a clever woman like this, to help her to steer safely through the first great crisis of her life. So they had run down to meet her at Richmond, where the little Southerner was coming with her mother by train.

But since the car had left New York, it had been hard for its owner to keep her thoughts on her cousin's crisis, for she had been forced by her huge companion to face a crisis of her own. Before their partnership began, the Prince had been drawn to the charming young widow because he thought her delightfully rich; and even when she frankly told him that she had no fortune but only a high salary from the large Chicago store, for which she was a buyer of gowns in New York and Paris, he had been attracted still. For Claire Cobb at twenty-eight was an extremely engaging young dame. She had won his fervent admiration by her quick resourcefulness in their adventures in New

York; and outside of business hours, too, his interest had rapidly grown. Often they went to the *Club Russe*; and dancing or dining together there, over and over and over again the Russian had patiently pressed his suit. Moreover, her interest too had deepened; for the unfailing courtesy of this prodigious creature, his whimsical and kindly ways and his boyish relish in life, all had made an increasing appeal. Still, however, she had held off. But now his patience was reaching an end—and on the ride down from New York, he had seized the chance to beg her again to consider a closer partnership. Here in Virginia an hour ago, they had passed a lovely old home, which reminded him of his home in Russia when he was a little boy. And he had been telling her of those days that could never return. For the Russia he had loved was gone and he was an exile now.

“I am a very lonely man,” he said, at the end of his account. “Dear lady, please give me a new home.”

Claire Cobb shot a smiling look at him out of her warm, brilliant blue eyes.

"I should like to give you a home," she said, "but you see, I'd have to marry you, and I am not ready for that."

He sighed. "Why do you torture me so?"

"I'm sorry if I torture you—for I like you—very much."

"Like, like? What good is it to like?" indignantly he answered. "You are a woman to love and be loved! So long as you live, you should have a husband—all the rest of your days and your nights!"

"The selfsame husband—all those nights?"

"And why not? And how can you tell," he asked, "how you would like it, to love and be loved, when never have you loved before?"

"Oh, yes, I loved," she corrected him. "You forget that I was married once. I eloped at eighteen—and once was enough!"

"Yes, yes," said the Russian impatiently, "you have told me of that before. He was wild and he drank your American gin and he treated you badly—but he is dead. So let us forget this wild young man and think about me and my wish for a home."

"You would be—enormous in a small home," his companion murmured, with a smile. But he disregarded that.

"Am I wild?" he demanded. She wrinkled her brows.

"Oh, yes, you are a little wild." His mammoth eyebrows lifted, in astonished, hurt reproach.

"Have I ever been wild with you, dear child?" Her expression quickly changed.

"No, you have been very kind to me."

"But how could I help, when I love you so?" he replied, in a low tone. And the humble devotion in his deep, gruff voice and his eyes brought a glimmer of fondness into her own. She looked at him, then turned quickly away.

"Dear Prince, at the beginning of this partnership of ours, you promised to be whatever I liked—a lover, a husband or only a friend."

"Yes, yes, but I can no longer endure to continue only a friend!" he replied. She frowned and turned again from him; but as she watched the landscape, a sudden intentness flashed on her face, as though some plan had come to her

—and rather an exciting plan. But she waited; and her voice, when she spoke, was as quiet as before.

“I’m sorry,” she answered, “for I should have liked to continue just as we are.” The car gave an angry burst of speed, and the young widow smiled at that. “But I think I have a plan,” she said, “which may help matters somewhat.”

“Dear lady, tell me at once, I implore you!” His charming companion shook her head.

“No, business before pleasure,” she said. And when he impatiently snorted at this, she went on, in a brisk and business-like tone: “We are almost in Richmond now and I beg of you to let me forget my own affairs and think of my cousin and my aunt, the ladies from Louisiana. For they’re far from business-like, poor dears, and there’s nearly a million dollars at stake in this little business deal. It will mean a big commission for us and a fortune for them, if we put it through.”

The Prince Borissovitch gave a sigh of utter resignation.



“Very well, dear child, forget me and think of nothing but business,” he said. “Oh, what a country! No wonder it’s rich!”

But she took him at his word; and firmly dismissing from her mind both the devotion of this man and the plan that had just come to her, she bent her thoughts on the affairs of her young cousin, Minna Rue.

Minna Rue Jackson had lived with her mother on an old plantation not far north of New Orleans; and since the death of her father, who had been no business man, the courageous little brunette had tried hard to make a decent living out of the neglected estate. With money loaned by her cousin up North, she had wrestled with boll weevil and floods and the cheerful love of idleness implanted in the negro heart; but it had been with poor success—until, about two months ago, oil was discovered not far from her home. Through the wild weeks of jubilee and frenzied speculation that followed, Minna Rue had kept her head, persuading her mother to refuse all offers for the lease of their land and watching its value swiftly rise. When at last the agent

of a great oil company made a bid for the old plantation, she had courageously held off still; and when the agent did the same, counting on her poverty to bring the little rebel to terms, she had written to her cousin up North. And Claire had telegraphed in reply:

“Sell nothing. Sign nothing. I have a plan. Am engaging passage for two on *Majestic* sailing next week and am mailing you five hundred dollars tonight. Tell agent of oil company you are sick of the whole affair and are taking your mother abroad. Then bring her by train to Richmond where I will meet you with my car. But mention this to nobody. Will write details before you start.”

The car reached Richmond in good time; and when the train arrived at six, Claire Cobb quickly boarded it and found her cousin and her aunt still in their compartment, collecting their belongings in a leisurely Southern way. A plump little lady with gorgeous white hair piled high upon her comely head, and a bright-looking small brunette whose eyes were of a vivid blue, joyously they greeted Claire and were

about to settle down to a good old-fashioned talk about the dazzling fortune, which was almost in their grasp, when their Northern cousin cut them off, by asking her young cousin:

“Has any one talked to you on the train?”

“Oh, deah me, yes,” smiled Minna Rue, “a nice young man named Hilary Lilly!”

“Related to the Lillies of Baton Rouge and Natchez, my love,” Aunt Ella drawled complacently.

“Related to that oil company, too?” demanded Claire Cobb, with a pleased little smile.

“Oh, yes, he is in their employ,” said Minna Rue, with an answering flash of mischief in her bright blue eyes. “And he is on his way, it seems, to their main office in New Yo’k. He wants to entatain us theah.”

“Did he raise their bid for that lease?”

“No, honey,” Aunt Ella placidly said. “But Mistah Lilly has fully explained how fo’tunate we-all will be if we accept his company’s terms. All the rest of our born days we can enjoy an income of ovah twenty thousand a yeah. And

I declare, I can't help thinkin' his advice is mighty wise—and I as good as told him so."

Claire looked at her aunt with grave reproach.

"Why, Aunt Ella, have you so soon forgotten poor Uncle Tom?" she asked. A flush of hurt astonishment came on her aunt's pretty face.

"Fo'get my own deah husband? Why, child, what in the world can you mean?"

"I mean," said Claire impressively, "that he was the grandest poker player in the whole State of Louisiana! Let's try and follow his wishes here, and in this little game stand pat! Now where is Mr. Hilary Lilly?"

For answer, her cousin pointed outside; and through the window, Claire caught sight of a slender blond young man on the platform, smoking a cigarette.

"Did you tell him I was meeting you?"

"Oh, deah me, no," drawled Minna Rue. "I undahstood by your telegram you wished us not to mention it."

"Good," said Claire. "Then tell him now, in a careless sort of way, that the car belongs to your New York cousin, who is arranging your

trip abroad and has sent her motor to meet you here."

"But," rejoined the bewildered Aunt Ella, "can't I present him to you, my love? He's really such a nice young man."

"Certainly not!" Claire Cobb replied. "I'm not your cousin, I'm her French maid, who can barely speak a word of English but will be useful to you in France! I'm to be your courier!"

And so, a few moments after this, Mr. Hilary Lilly saw, to his dismayed surprise, the two ladies from Louisiana get off the train, with their wraps and bags carried behind by a chic French maid and a huge and most imposing chauffeur in livery of rich maroon! Where now was the poverty his company had counted on to bring Minna Rue and her mother to terms? Quickly the chagrined young man followed them down the platform; and at sight of the Car of Croesus, panic leaped into his eyes! But bravely he pulled himself together and exclaimed, with an affable smile:

"Why, ladies, ladies! 'Pon my soul, this is

a most unpleasant surprise! I reckon I'm go'n' to be mighty lonely all the rest of the way to New Yo'k! Why didn't you say you were leavin' so soon?"

Poor Aunt Ella swallowed hard, but her lively little daughter rose to the emergency with a sparkle of delight.

"I declare it completely slipped my mind, Mistah Lilly," she said repentantly. "You-all had so much of interest to say to us that Ma and me plumb fo'got our present plans in lookin' into the future lives, which you so temptingly described!"

"But—wheah you goin' in this heah car? And whose is it?" Hilary Lilly asked.

"Oh," carelessly answered Minna Rue, "it belongs to my cousin in New Yo'k. She's a right wealthy widow, you see; and when I wrote her how poor Ma was worryin' so about that lease, my cousin advised me to take her abroad and dismiss from our minds the whole affair. And she's sent her car to meet us here, fo' it will be such a lovely ride up through Virginia and Maryland. We still got plenty of time, you

see, fo' our boat don't sail till Friday night." Hilary Lilly gave a start.

"But, ladies! That's only three days mo'!" In the next moment, the baffled young man seemed to be thinking fast and hard. "You goin' on this evenin'?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she replied, "fo' I reckon poor Ma bettah have a good long sleep tonight. So good-bye, Mistah Lilly." With a smile, she held out her small gloved hand. "And thank you fo' all that kind advice. You've made our trip right pleasant so far, all the way up from New Orleans."

Then she followed her mother into the car, and the next moment it rolled away, while Hilary Lilly, with a look of desperation in his face, hurried back to his waiting train.

But late the following morning, when Minna Rue and her mother blithely emerged from their hotel, wearing the expensive new clothes their Cousin Claire had brought down from New York, as they stood waiting by the car, while the maid and the chauffeur stowed their bags, Minna Rue gave a chuckle of glee. For in an old flivver



just down the street, behind a ragged colored chauffeur, sat their friend, young Hilary Lilly. Gayly he waved to them and cried:

“Don’t mind me, ladies! I felt so bad ovah bein’ so cruelly left behind that I declare I couldn’t stand it! So, if you-all will allow me, I’m plannin’ to come along fo’ a while!”

And so the Car of Croesus left Richmond, with the battered old Ford of the great oil company’s agent humbly following behind.

“This is as it should be,” murmured Claire Cobb, with malicious content, for everything was working out just about as she had hoped. They were hardly out of town, however, when with a roar the flivver passed them; and with a puzzled air, she asked: “Now what little game has he in mind?”

But her small cousin only smiled. For Minna Rue was very wise as to the little games of young men.

“I reckon we’d bettah give him a chance to get a little distance ahead,” was her somewhat cryptic reply. So the big Car of Croesus slowed down, till the flivver was well out of sight. Then

they went on; and a few minutes later, they found the poor old vehicle helplessly wrecked, in a ditch by the road. One of the front wheels was off, the engine was moaning like a sick cow, and the ragged colored chauffeur was listening with a lugubrious air to the apparently furious remarks of his young passenger. But when the Car of Croesus came up, the wrath of Mr. Hilary Lilly changed at once to a most engaging and apologetic smile.

“Ladies, I stand befo’ you-all with my pride in the dust,” he said. “This old contraption is plumb wrecked, an’ fo’ the life of me all I can do is to throw myself at you’ lovely feet.”

“Why, Mistah Lilly,” cried Minna Rue, “what a misfo’tune you have had! And all so unexpected, too! Why don’t you ride with us fo’ a while?”

Thanking her delightedly, he lost no time in transferring his bag; and taking his seat between the two ladies, he was profuse in apologies still. As the car went on its way, the young man’s inquisitive eyes took in the dove-colored upholstery, the gleaming silver fittings

and the lustrous sable robe lined with pale grey velvet, and also the expensive new clothes of his two fellow-travellers. But if all this caused him any concern, he kept it strictly to himself. Gayly he admired the car and asked about its owner, the wealthy cousin in New York. And as though spurred on by what he heard from the malicious Minna Rue, who glibly told of her cousin's wealth and keen, sagacious business head, Hilary Lilly outdid himself in Southern affability. He begged them to tell him all about their plans for the next few months abroad; and after listening for a while with a warm, friendly sympathy, he adroitly brought the talk to the subject nearest to his heart.

“I declare, ladies,” he exclaimed, “I only wish I could be with you! What a grand time you-all will have! But how much bettah it would be, if you could just make up you’ minds about this heah oil lease befo’ you go, an’ so have no business cares to spoil you’ pleasure ovah theah!”

Minna Rue gave him a grateful glance; and to the sudden consternation of Claire Cobb in

the front seat, the guileless little Southerner said:

“Why, Mistah Lilly, that seems to me to be a most excellent idea. And so, if you-all wouldn’t mind goin’ ovah the whole question again, Ma and me would be mo’ than pleased and grateful fo’ your good advice.”

Promptly then the eager young agent proceeded to enlighten them on the immense advantages to be gained by accepting his company’s terms. Gravely listening, Minna Rue punctuated his discourse by approving murmurs of assent. And at the end, she answered:

“You’ve been right good to us, Mistah Lilly. I do believe it would be wise to settle up this whole affair and sign that lease this very night.”

“I’m sure it would, ladies!” the agent cried. And all the rest of that April day, while the Car of Croesus sped north, he laid himself out to be nice to them and to fortify the decision just made, by the most entrancing pictures of life on twenty thousand a year—while Claire Cobb in the front seat listened, in deepening

wrath and concern. But in Washington, late that afternoon, as the car drew up at their hotel, she heard her small cousin from the South say to the eager young man at her side:

“‘Befo’ we sign that oil lease, the idea occurs to my mind that it might be just as well to telegraph my cousin first. She’s so wise about such things, and she might be offended, if we acted without her advice.”

Then, with an innocent little smile, she left the disappointed young agent and went to her room with her French maid. And on coming down to dinner that night, she placidly showed Mr. Lilly a telegram from her cousin, which read:

“Do not bother about that lease. I am sending my own lawyer South to arrange it for you while you are abroad. Can hardly wait to see you—Claire Cobb.”

“Well, well!” murmured Hilary Lilly, with a glimmer of alarm. “That does seem to me like a needless expense!”

He did a little telegraphing that night on his own account; and the next morning in the car,

he told the ladies that his chief had called upon their cousin late last evening in New York, and had found that she was out of town! Panic in Aunt Ella's face! But once again her daughter rose to the emergency.

"Oh, yes, Mistah Lilly, I plumb fo'got to tell you," answered Minna Rue. "I didn't telegraph to New Yo'k—I telegraphed to Newpo't. My cousin had to run up theah, you see, to arrange about a new floor in the ballroom of her spacious summah home."

From the front seat of the car, at this, came a low chortle of delight. But Mr. Hilary Lilly looked so very dismal at the news he had just heard, that, to relieve his depression, his charming young companion added, in a cheerful tone:

"But I'm sure that you'll still have a chance to meet my cousin in New Yo'k—fo' she'll be theah; I have no doubt, when we-all sail tomorrow night."

"Tomorrow night?" the young man cried. Minna Rue glanced at him then like a cat, who is playing with a mouse.

“At midnight—on the *Majestic*,” she said. “My cousin has got us a cabin de luxe.”

“But, ladies,” cried the agent, who had been counting on his chief to put through the deal in New York, “how you-all go’n’ to make that boat? Heah it is already almost noon an’ we still down in Maryland!”

“Oh,” his small tormentor said, “I see no cause to worry ourselves. We’ve nothin’ what-evah to do in New Yo’k, and I nevah did see in all my life such a lovely day as this!” Graciously the young imp leaned forward. “Antoinette,” she directed her French maid, “will you please info’m the chauffeur that we wish to go slow, so we can enjoy this most adorable country heah.”



## CHAPTER XVI

AND she did enjoy it—all the rest of that April day. As though serenely oblivious of the highly nervous state of the gentleman at her side, she kept pointing out old Southern homes and various points of loveliness. When they stopped in Wilmington for the night, she begged him to take her to the movies; and when they returned at eleven o'clock, his face was haggard, her eyes were bright. He must have kept the wires hot, in the middle of that night, for at breakfast he triumphantly announced that he had prevailed on his chief to offer them even more generous terms for the leasing of their land. But just as the desperate young man was launching into the subject of petroleum once more, he was stopped by Minna Rue. With a little grimace, she said:

“I do hate to heah about oil with my coffee! Really, Mistah Lilly, I do believe we’d bettah

leave this whole matter to discuss with my cousin in New Yo'k."

"But, ladies," Mr. Lilly cried, "we-all won't have any time in New Yo'k! Heah it is nearly ten o'clock an' we still down in Delaware!"

"Oh, we can make it in this car, and I see no cause to worry at all," placidly answered Minna Rue.

So they lunched in Philadelphia. And they dawdled over the meal till the young man went nearly insane. Then on they went. But at Princeton—with sixty miles to cover still—Minna Rue made a discovery which caused her vivid little blue eyes to sparkle with anticipation.

"Why, Ma," she exclaimed, "I do believe heah we are at Princeton—poor deah Pa's old college town! We just can't let this chance go by!"

So, in spite of the intensely earnest warnings of their escort, she insisted on stopping and taking her mother about the lovely old campus there. She had many questions to ask of the students, whom they met as they strolled about.

Old memories rose, of talks with her father, when she was a little girl; and she spent nearly an hour in trying to locate his old room. After that, they dined at the Inn; and when at nine that evening they were ready to start on, the face of Mr. Hilary Lilly would have wrung compassion from any but a feminine heart!

“Wheah can he be?” Aunt Ella asked, as the car waited at the door. For their escort had not yet appeared.

“Oh, he’s sending some more telegrams,” answered the malicious French maid. “He asked the Prince, five minutes ago, which ferry we are crossing on.”

A few moments later, he came out and they started for New York.

“Step on the gas,” murmured Claire to the Prince. “We’ll need half an hour at least for that talk. And if we don’t come to a settlement with that oil company tonight, I’ll have to mortgage this motor, my dear, for we’ve barely a dollar left at the bank!”

“No money left, dear lady?” the Prince re-

joined, in a low tone. "I supposed we had two thousand."

"We did—when we left New York last week!" She flashed a quick, excited smile. "But I told you on the ride that I had a plan for you and me—and it has taken every cent! How much have you?"

"A hundred."

"Good."

"But where can you have spent the rest?"

"Here in New York! I've done a little telegraphing on my own account!" she said.

"Tell me! I implore you!"

"No! Business before pleasure!" she smiled. "Sh-h! Listen!" From behind them came the drawling voice of Minna Rue:

"My wealthy cousin has no doubt returned to town by this time, and she'll be with us at the pier."

"Now step on it!" murmured Claire to her friend. And obeying her, the enormous chauffeur started for New York at a speed that would have brought disaster had they met a cycle cop. At eleven P.M., he ran the car onto the ferry at

Jersey City; and she had barely left her slip, when Mr. Lilly excused himself, stepped out of the motor and disappeared. As the boat neared the Manhattan shore, he returned to them with a stranger, whom he introduced as his chief. And graciously the ladies invited both the gentlemen in. The newcomer was an elderly man, with a pleasant, kind and fatherly smile, and eyes like gimlets. In swift appraisal, they took in the car's luxurious elegance and the innocent gullibility displayed upon the faces of Aunt Ella and Minna Rue.

"I wish there were more time," he smiled, "to enjoy this charming brief acquaintance. But I'm told that you're anxious to settle at once this vexing little business of yours. And so——"

"Why, Mistah Lilly—how could you have misled him so?" interrupted Minna Rue. "We feel no cause fo' anxiety," she added, to the older man, "fo' we have placed this whole affaiah in the hands of a wealthy cousin of ours, who is to be with us at the pier." The New Yorker looked at his watch.

“Far be it from me,” he suavely replied, “to try to forestall your cousin in this. I’d be the first to counsel you to get her advice and take plenty of time. But unfortunately we have no time. In ten minutes we shall be at the dock; and in twenty minutes after that, all visitors must leave the ship! What a pity to spoil your good-bye to your cousin by haggling over money affairs! And I’ve hated haggling all my life. So, at the suggestion, I may even say the urgent pleading, of my young associate here—who seems to me to have become a suspiciously ardent champion of yours—I’ve decided to settle the whole affair by drawing up a deed of sale. Why bother to lease that land of yours? Why not just sell it and be done? You won’t want to live there any more, after they start drilling for oil.” But his speech was here cut off by a little wail from Minna Rue.

“That’s just it!” the poor girl cried. “When we think of those ugly derricks stickin’ up all ovah the place and the smell of oil on every hand, poor Ma and me go plumb distracted! It has often seemed to us that we just can’t

bring ourselves to such a desecration, suh, of our deah old Southern home!" At this affecting reference, the eyes of poor Aunt Ella grew sincerely bright with tears; and she reached for her handkerchief, while her little daughter went on: "So we're hopin' our wealthy cousin heah may offah to buy the place herself, and so put off all thought of oil, until we can accustom ourselves to the idea of some othah home."

"I'm afraid she could hardly offer you such terms as these, my dear young lady," the New Yorker answered, drawing out a document. "There are many lovely old homes in the South still to be bought for a mere song—and once your mother signs this paper, you can choose what home you like. For we have raised the figure here to seven hundred thousand—and to show you what that means, I may add that, when invested, it will assure you an income of nearly forty thousand a year! You'll be as good as millionaires!" He turned to Aunt Ella with a smile. "Moreover, as soon as we sign the deed, by way of paying a little cash down, I've brought along a foreign draft for twenty



thousand, made out in your name, so that you may both be well supplied for the fascinating shops of Paris!"

At this dazzling offer, Minna Rue could not repress a little murmur of delight. But just at this moment, the Car of Croesus gave a violent burst of speed that almost threw them from their seats!

"*Ah, mon Dieu!*" cried the French maid. Up went her hands, as though in alarm. And the thumb and four fingers on one hand, and three on the other, were plainly displayed. Instantly observing this signal from her cousin, quickly Minna Rue behind added five and three together, and said, with a regretful smile:

"I'm right sorry we can't accept your very generous offer, suh. But my cousin, whose excellent lawyer has already looked into this case, through a friend of his in Baton Rouge, has advised us to accept no less than eight hundred thousand fo' our home."

"Eight hundred thousand dollars—for that one small location?" the distressed New Yorker cried.

“Ladies, ladies!” from Hilary Lilly.

“My deah child,” Aunt Ella said, “it may be this gentleman is right.”

“I know I’m right!” the gentleman said. “For here we are almost at the dock! We have only twenty minutes left till visitors must leave the ship! And though I should be glad, of course, to meet this wealthy cousin of yours—if you will pardon my being quite frank, my experience with ladies is that no matter how charming they may be, they do waste time in talking so, when it comes to business of this kind.”

Minna Rue gave a little giggle at that.

“Why, suh, how can you slander us so?” she asked, with a coquettish glance. “What you say about ladies may once have been true—but evah since we got the vote——”

“Never mind about votes for women now! Let’s stick to business—if you please!” the distracted male replied.

“My cousin will surprise you theah,” Minna Rue replied to that. “Pa once told me he nevah did see in all his life a woman so keen and busi-

ness-like. To quote him exactly, suh, he said: 'She ain't a woman—she's a hawk!' "

This information, although imparted with the most guileless friendly smile, acted on both gentlemen like a blow below the belt! And before they could recover, she promptly added to their distress. For a look of sharp anxiety crossed her comely little face. "Oh, deah me!" cried Minna Rue. "Is it possible I can have made a mistake? Did she say eight hundred or was it nine?"

Mr. Hilary Lilly crumpled at this, but his chief was made of sterner stuff. And he was a man of quick decisions.

"I feel quite sure it was eight," he said drily, as the car drew up at the pier, "for no lawyer in his senses, and in possession of the facts, could possibly think of asking more. As it is, the price is ruinous." But while speaking, he took out a fountain pen and quickly changed the figure to the one that Minna Rue had asked. "Now, if you ladies will sign this with me, we'll have it over and done with," he said. "There's a notary public up on the pier."

As they all got out of the car, Claire Cobb looked anxiously around. A man stepped up and drew her aside, but their interview was so brief that by the time the Prince Borissovitch had unstrapped the luggage, she was ready to go with him after the others into the great pier shed. They soon found the notary and the deed was quickly signed. Into Aunt Ella's trembling hand was put the draft for twenty thousand, but her small daughter, Minna Rue, promptly took charge of draft and deed and crammed them into her vanity bag.

"Now wheah is this terrible cousin of yours?" Mr. Hilary Lilly asked.

"Gentlemen," she answered, with a sweet, disarming smile, "I info'med you that my cousin would be with us on the pier. And heah she is."

And she turned to the maid, who stood demurely at her side.

"Delighted to meet you," said Claire Cobb to the astonished gentlemen. "When I met my little cousin in Richmond, I thought she might need my advice. But, gentlemen, her father, the

late Colonel Jackson, was the grandest poker player in Louisiana! And it seems that blood does tell!"

And before either one of them could reply, the ladies from Louisiana and their cousin from New York turned and started for the ship, while the enormous prince-chauffeur, with an ironical gleam in his eyes, picked up their bags and followed them.

Claire Cobb turned sharply back to him.

"Drop that luggage right where it is! We'll wait for you here!" she cried. "Dash back to the car and bring *our* bags, too, and my little motor trunk! We'll have just time to get on board!"

He looked at her dumbfounded.

"We also are sailing on this ship?"

"We are!"

"But the tickets!"

"I've got them!" she cried. "I telegraphed a good friend I could trust to bring tickets and money to the pier! He did—and I've paid him with a check for all that's left of our worldly wealth! But we'll cash Aunt Ella's draft in

France! You'll find my friend back there in the car! He's to ship it after us on the next boat—for our wedding trip!"

"Croesus!" shouted the Prince. "You will marry me?"

"In Paris, *mon cher!*"

From the liner, there came an ear-shattering roar. And after one dazzled look at his bride, the Prince Ivan Borissovitch started up the crowded pier like a runaway elephant—joyously trumpeting traffic aside!









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